Breaking the Silence: Power Relations and Sexual Violence in Octavia E. Butler's Kindred and Valerie Martin's Property

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Norwegian Abstract - Norsk Sammendrag

I sine romaner *Kindred* (1979) og *Property* (2003) gir Octavia E. Butler Valerie og Martin et tilbakeblikk på den amerikanske slavehistorien hvor det rettes kritikk mot rase- og kulturfordommer og patriarkalske ideologier. Forfatterne tilbyr alternative perspektiv som problematiserer sosiale maktstrukturer med hensyn til rase og kjønnspolitikk. Gjennom analyse av tekstpolitikken og forfatternes intensjoner utforsker oppgaven hvordan romanene rekonstruerer minner om slavefortiden, hvor hovedfokuset er deres framstillinger av den afroamerikanske kvinnelige hovedpersonen. Oppgaven undersøker hvordan de ulike fortellerperspektivene påvirker disse framstillingene og de tekstlige strategiene. Butlers roman reflekterer samfunnsholdninger of kulturfordommer i forfatterens samtid samt etnisk- og kulturpolitiske holdninger til afroamerikanske kvinner, som hovedpersonen erfarer. Martins roman analyseres i henhold til hvordan den svarte kvinnen objektifiseres gjennom den hvite kvinnen's fortellerperspektiv som er påvirket av slaveinstitusjonen's ideologier. Seksuell vold er et gjennomgående tema i de to tekstene og blir framstilt som en kritikk mot maktrelasjoner og ideologier som definerer og dominerer "Den Andre."

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Introduction

Slavery as a traumatic historical legacy in America has affected the nation and its citizens in many ways and raises questions about racial and gender oppression. The atrocities of the abominable institution have been recounted since the days of slavery until the present day; from first-person accounts of African Americans' experience in bondage to "aftertestimonies" by subsequent generations of writers who inscribe the memory of slavery within a fictional frame. After the abolition of slavery in America in 1865, testimonials allowed African Americans who were freed from bondage to share their experience of enslavement and suffering with the rest of the world. Along with these written accounts, the severed skin of the formerly enslaved became important physical evidence of the cruelty of the institution. During the period of 1936-1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Federal Writers' Project collected stories of the remaining generations of former slaves to insure that their personal memories were written down and preserved. Although these were first-person accounts of slave experience, the compilation took place several decades after emancipation, which meant that the interviewees were often influenced by a fading memory. The powerful legacy of the institution is reflected in former slaves' often degrading terms about themselves, which indicates the psychological implications of slaveholding ideologies which held that African Americans were subhuman creatures of an inferior race. In the late twentieth century, most of those who had been formerly enslaved passed away.

The socio-political tensions in American society during the sixties and seventies engendered a need to rethink history and to look back on the past as the nation still seemed to create and recreate ideologies of race, gender, and family which originated in the "peculiar institution." Racial ideologies seemed to continue to exist covertly in social, political, and juridical spheres, denoting how thoroughly embedded the underpinnings of the institution

were within American society. Prevailing emphasis on patriarchic authority in the public as well as in the domestic sphere, in addition to negating references to African American family life, not only failed to recognize history's influence on current conditions but also served to maintain hegemonic ideologies of white male supremacy.

While the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s struggled against racial segregation, the feminist movement fought for gender equality and against power that be. However, African American women were left on the periphery of both racial and gender politics. The Black Aesthetic movement was part of the Black Power movement and served to promote African American culture and identity, but the discourse failed to accommodate Black feminist demands. Similarly, white feminists neglected issues that related to black women's experience by not acknowledging their different histories. Thus the Black feminist discourse emerged as a countermovement towards the end of the 1960s and developed a critique of both racism and sexism which centered on the African American female subject. Black women writers saw the necessity to rewrite the master narrative by shedding light on the African American female experience which had long been neglected and misrepresented in historical discourse.

As a means to problematize the double oppression of black women, these writers contributed to the genre of neo-slave narratives which explores slavery's ramifications in the present from a feminist angle. The novels give voice to the formerly silenced subjects and respond to the pressing need of the 1970s to deconstruct the stigmatization of black womanhood that dominated the historiography of slavery. Because hegemonic ideologies and social constructs are mainly created and maintained through discourse, literature is also a site where these ideas may be challenged and revised.

The resurgent interest in slavery in the seventies was in part a result of the extensive response to Daniel Patrick Moynihan's Report, "The Negro Family" (1965) and the publication of Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976) which sparked a newfound curiosity in genealogy. Moynihan and Haley both contributed to the discourse on the African American family, yet received attention from black feminists who criticized the former's negative references to black womanhood and the latter's exclusion of the African American female experience. While Moynihan argued for the necessity of patriarchic authority in black family life as a means of accommodation to the dominant culture, Haley focused on the black male experience in his challenging exploration of familial roots which revealed slavery's dispersal of African American families. In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987), Hortense Spillers explores the disruption of the African American family which began with the Atlantic slave trade. Her essay confronts and critiques Moynihan's Report which claims that the contemporary matriarchic structure of African American families is a pathologization mainly because it goes against the constructed "nuclear family" practiced by the majority of the nation.

Spillers describes the "nuclear family" in the West as "the *vertical* transfer of a bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements…from *fathers* to sons and in the supposedly free exchange of affectional ties between a male and a female of *his* choice (74; italics in the original). Captive persons during the Middle Passage, on the other hand, were "*forced* into patterns of *dispersal*" and further into "*horizontal* relatedness of language groups, discourse formations, bloodlines, names, and properties by the legal arrangements of enslavement (Spillers 75; italics in the original). Within the slaveholding institution the master was always the head of the "family" and had the right to claim ownership of enslaved offspring regardless of kinship. Consequently, enslaved African Americans were not entitled to their own children, and the offspring, who were often fathered by the slave holder himself,

had no claim to patrimony since he/she inevitably followed the condition of the mother. Because African Americans were dehumanized and treated as chattel they had no rights or means to sustain former cultural traditions or to maintain "normal" family life. As Spillers observes, "'kinship' loses meaning, *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*" (74; italics in the original).

Due to their status as property, black women were perceived as genderless, yet were exploited on the basis of their sex as mere "breeders" to increase their owner's "stock" and as objects of sexual gratification to white male enslavers. This commodification of enslaved female bodies was justified by hegemonic conceptions of black women's supposedly inherent lasciviousness which made them available targets of rape. One may say that race ultimately degenders the African American woman as her body is objectified and exploited on the basis of her sex. As social structures still placed the black woman at the bottom of the social hierarchy – doubly oppressed by racism and sexism – it became crucial to revisit slavery as a site of memory and to reveal the interrelatedness between the past and the present. Accordingly, late twentieth-century African American women writers explore the female legacy of slavery by adopting the original form of nineteenth-century slave narratives as a way of recovering the traumatic memories of the past. Neo-slave narratives thus add new layers to the historical narrative, which opens up for new interpretations about American society in general and the African American female experience in particular.

Angelyn Mitchell suggests that the neo-slave narratives can be seen as liberatory narratives because they engage "the historical period of chattel slavery" to "provide new models of liberation by problematizing the concept of freedom" (4). Twentieth-century novels of slavery thus differ from original slave narratives in that they are "self-conscious" about the thematics of these former texts and are more concerned with the African American subject as a free citizen than its experience in bondage (Mitchell 4). By presenting their black female

protagonists as subjects and agents, authors of neo-slave narratives, such as Octavia E. Butler in this thesis, target the prevailing objectification of "blackness" and femininity. Thus the novels center on the protagonist's transition from bondage to freedom and focus on its "conception and articulation of herself as a free, autonomous, self-authorized self" (Mitchell 4). The self in relation to social constructions of race and gender is a quintessential theme within Black feminist discourse in which issues of sexuality, community, and family are prominent. By merging the past with the present, novels of slavery also challenge established linear perceptions of history, demonstrating how the slave past may seem like a rupture or "a tear in the fabric of history" (Rushdy 4), and that a lapse of time does not erase the haunting presence of that past.

This thesis focuses on two novels of slavery – Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Valerie Martin's *Property* (2003) – which both recover the traumatic memories of the slave past and reconstruct the historical master narrative. The texts offer complementary narratives to the historiography of slavery as they are both written from the perspective of a marginalized social subject; the African American woman and the white plantation mistress. Moreover, the two authors' cultural and ethnic backgrounds concur with that of their protagonist-narrators', which is reflected in their politics of narration. Although each of the texts inscribes the memory of slavery as a means to critique racist and patriarchic ideologies, they notably differ in their portrayals of the black female subject and the theme of concubinage. They share an underlying critique of hegemonic presentations and representations which define "blackness" and femininity as "Other," yet Martin's text is self-conscious about the racist perspective from which it is written. This is seen by how the protagonist-narrator, a white woman and the wife of a slaveholder, portrays the enslaved African American woman as sexual object and the ultimate "Other." By exposing the subjective influence on the white female protagonist's negative and stereotypical depiction of

the black woman, the text reveals how social constructs are socio-politically created and recreated. Butler's *Kindred* sets out to deconstruct the objectification of black women by giving her protagonist-narrator a subject position from which she portrays herself as a self-authorized agent. In order to demonstrate the constraining forces of socio-political paradigms which place individuals in positions of domination and subordination, Butler also shows the limitations of identity-formation. The authors of these texts both address the sexual violation of enslaved African American women by white men during slavery and demonstrate how rape becomes a sign of white male authority. Although the issue of rape has been a topic of critical attention in relation to the texts, the ideology of…sexual violation of black women by white men needs further exploration in order to expose prevailing power hierarchies and show the interrelatedness of racial and gender oppression.

Chapter One explores Butler's *Kindred* which offers the first-person perspective of the African American female protagonist, Dana Franklin, a late twentieth-century woman who is forced to confront her familial history in slavery. The novel is set in California in the year of 1976, the bicentennial of the United States Declaration of Independence whose proclamation of human rights is reflected in its credo, "all men are created equal." It is also the year that marked the decade which declared interracial marriage constitutional in America, a significant event since the protagonist is recently married to her white husband, Kevin Franklin. By exploring the mixed-raced relationship between a black woman and a white man in the historical setting of the 1970s, the novel reflects the socio-political tensions pertaining to racism and sexism in the then American society.

The text is constructed as a neo-slave narrative as it adopts the original form of nineteenth-century slave testimonies and centers on a late twentieth-century protagonist's experience of bondage which challenges her sense of self and her notion of freedom. However, the author also employs the fantastic element of time travel as her means of

demonstrating the connectedness between the past and the present. Instead of exploring a dystopian, futuristic world, which is seen in Butler's works of science fiction, the novel revisits the dystopian past of slavery which becomes a mirror image of contemporary society. The novel offers its protagonist a threshold into familial history as a means to demonstrate the necessity of confronting the past in order to have a meaningful life in the present. By constructing her protagonist-narrator as an aspiring writer, Butler emphasizes her own need as a late-twentieth century woman writer to reconnect with her ancestral past and to reconstruct and articulate the traumatic memories of slavery. The chapter explores how the novel illustrates both the necessity and difficulty of recovering and reliving these memories, arguing that the process is essential as a means to confront and resolve contemporary racial and gender issues.

The protagonist-narrator's involuntary time travels are initiated and seemingly controlled by her white male ancestor, Rufus Weylin, and her discovery of her mixed-race origin sets out the premise of the novel. Being forced to relive the trauma of her maternal ancestor raises Dana's awareness about history in general and her female heritage in particular; in order to see herself in a broader social context, she must learn how her maternal ancestors were exploited as chattel on the basis of their skin color and sex. Accordingly, her time travels suggest a metaphysical movement across time and space, whereby she undergoes a transition from being a subject in her own right to retaining the status as object, vulnerable to physical and sexual violence by white male authority. Chapter One analyzes the novel's portrayal of black womanhood in the context of slavery as well as the protagonist's growing awareness about the circumscribed and threatening environment of her maternal ancestors. By focusing on bodily experience under slavery, Butler craves attention to the importance of understanding the long history of violence to black women's bodies. The convergence of the past and the present highlights the haunting presence of slavery in contemporary society and

directs attention to the ongoing objectification and stigmatization of black women. In order to show how the novel critiques and rejects hegemonic conceptions of "blackness" and femininity, it is necessary to look at the ways in which it blurs the boundaries of socio-politically constructed binaries.

Chapter Two of this thesis explores Martin's *Property* which complements Butler's *Kindred* with its alternative perspective on chattel slavery in general and the African American female subject in particular. The text reframes the theme of sexual violence and the exploitation of the black female body by presenting it from the point of view of the white plantation mistress. Constructed as an historical novel, the novel is set in the antebellum South and centers on the protagonist-narrator, Manon Gaudet. She is unhappily married to a slave holder whose sexual inclinations lie with his wife's African American maid, Sarah. Like *Kindred,* the novel poses a critique against presentations and representations of "Otherness," yet differs in that it objectifies the black woman and portrays her as the ultimate "Other." This portrayal is influenced by Manon's racial bias and jealousy which causes her to blame her black maid for her husband's transgressions. By relying on stigmatizing images of black women's promiscuity, the protagonist eschews her own experience of oppression as a woman in a patriarchic environment by degrading her female slave. Thus the novel demonstrates the interrelatedness between racial and gender discrimination; oppressed by society at large and her husband in particular, Manon exploits her presumed social privilege of being white to project her own powerlessness onto Sarah. The objectification of the black female body and the manifestation of hierarchical power relations will be explored by showing how the protagonist-narrator's subjective experience influences the portrayal of the African American woman. Thus the chapter will explore how the black woman is objectified at the level of the narrative as well as within the novel with regard to her status as property. Womanhood and motherhood are key issues which help to show how both women's sexuality is controlled and

regulated by white male authority and violence. The opposing images of black womanhood and white womanhood within the institution of slavery serve to reveal how white male hegemony appropriated the sexuality of all women to serve white men's needs.

My thesis will analyze the ways in which Butler's *Kindred* and Martin's *Property* inscribe the memory of slavery and how their different perspectives on the African American female experience serve to challenge and complement the hegemonic narrative, both within the texts and in the actual world. Thus I will explore how the novels negotiate the tension between self-perception and perception by others, and between individual and society. The novels challenge dominant ideologies of white/male superiority and their recreation of normative social structures by exposing the construction of power relations. This contention is derived by the novels' depictions of inter – and intraracial relationships and how they expose power relations with regard to race and gender. Both texts seem to demonstrate that racial and gender identities are culturally constructed and thus variable.

Spillers will help to shed light on the ways in which slavery commodified the captive female body and how contemporary hegemonic discourse fails to acknowledge the complexity of African American women's history. Spillers emphasizes the importance of understanding how ideologies of patriarchy and white superiority have shaped African American women's history from the time of slavery until the present day. She argues that African American women should be treated as gendered subjects, but rejects exclusive categories of femininity and the failure to acknowledge the different histories of black and white women in particular.

Ashraf Rushdy's theories about the legacy of slavery in America is used in Chapter One to illustrate how the slave past can be seen as a family secret which haunt the lives of individuals and families in the present. Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory will be

helpful in the analysis of Butler's protagonist's connection with her familial past and her maternal ancestor in particular. Hirsch describes the process of postmemory as an intergenerational transmission of memories which results in the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first. The theory demonstrates how descendants of victims of cultural trauma may "adopt" the traumatic memories of their ancestors by means of a familial or familiar connection. The theory offers a way of analyzing Butler's employment of time travel in *Kindred* and helps to enforce the importance of working through and understanding a traumatic historical past as silence may only serve to recreate trauma and perpetuate tensions in the present.

Chapter One The Black Woman as Subject: Possibilities and Limitations

Butler's novel *Kindred* shares with many neo-slave narratives the portrayal of subjects who are confronted with familial roots in slavery, which demonstrates how family secrets often emerge when a feeling of shame is attached to those roots: "Shame often leads to secrecy; and family shame produces family secrets" (Redford qtd. in Rushdy 18). Such secrets, Butler's novel suggests, may have a haunting effect on families and individuals in the present. Set in late twentieth-century California, the novel centers on the African American female protagonist-narrator, Dana Franklin, whose confrontation with her familial past reveals that her great-grandfather, Rufus, a white slave holder, raped his slave, her great-grandmother, Alice. Consequently, their daughter, Hagar, was born into slavery but was eventually freed, continuing the line of descent that would ensure Dana's birth.

On her twenty-sixth birthday, Dana experiences the haunting presence of her ancestors for the first time and is uncannily transported from her California living room to nineteenth-century Maryland. This scenario is repeated six times and makes up the six chapters of the novel, between a Prologue and an Epilogue. Each chapter starts with the present or near present in California which continues with the past of antebellum Maryland. By employing the trope of time travel, Butler turns the gaze back on America's historical past and demonstrates the need to recover the traumatic memories of slavery that have been repressed by master narratives and the nation at large. In order to underscore the haunting presence of the slave past in late twentieth-century American society, Butler portrays the two historical settings as uncanny doubles, thus blurring the boundaries of time and space. As Mitchell suggests; "This duality of setting forces the reader to consider how integral the past is in understanding the present and in constructing the future" (44).

As a means to critique prevailing racist and patriarchic ideologies, the novel explores the maternal legacy of slavery, including the simultaneous objectification and sexualization of enslaved female bodies which have served to mark black women until the present day. As Dana is inserted into the past, into the life of her maternal ancestor, she is forced to experience slavery first-hand, including the constant threat of rape. In the antebellum South, the sexual exploitation of black women is a sign of white male authority, which serves to challenge Dana's self-perception. By portraying Kevin and Dana as doubles of their nineteenth-century counterparts, Rufus and Alice, Butler reinforces the image of the white man as the oppressor and the black woman as the oppressed, thus problematizing prevailing ideologies of race and gender. Accordingly, Dana and Kevin's home in twentieth-century California transforms into a site of insecurity as the dystopian past melts into the present.

The protagonist-narrator's portrayal of her and Kevin as kindred spirits offers hope and possibilities – suggesting that there is no difference between "black" and "white" – yet the haunting and vivid presence of the past challenges and threatens to destroy their union. Dana's need to face her ancestral past demonstrates the dangerous consequences of repression as the novel shows how family secrets have the proclivity to trigger shame and trauma in the lives of subsequent generations. The protagonist-narrator's trauma is reflected in the novel's structure: her "memories" emerge in fragments and become more threatening as they gradually reach the surface. Her time travels demonstrate how she embodies the traumatic memories of her maternal ancestors, memories which require a return to the source of their origin, which demands that they be relived in order to acquire new meaning in the present and to establish a new sense of self.

Blurring the Boundaries of "Race" and Gender

The slave past may be seen as a family secret because it has in various ways had a reverberating effect on the whole nation since its beginning; though it is not acknowledged by all, it still haunts the lives of many. "[T]he family secret of America" haunts "the peripheries of the national imaginary because it is what we think we know, what we can never forget, and what seems continually to elude our understanding" (Mitchell qtd. in Rushdy 2). This haunted imagery of the slave past as well as the metaphor of a family secret indicates that "the past is not dead, but likewise not seen or acknowledged by all" (Rushdy 2-3). Set in the bicentennial year of 1976, *Kindred* at once demonstrates the need to look back to the beginning of the nation and on the institution of slavery, which preceded its birth. Although the bicentennial was meant to be a celebratory occasion for America, for African Americans it was a reminder of their long history of oppression and suffering which had not yet come to an end. It was also a crucial moment for African American women to let their voices be heard, having been left on the margins of both racial and gender politics. This moment thus called for a critical reevaluation of history, including the need to explore the African American female experience that has come to haunt black women in the present.

As a means of rejecting hegemonic social constructions, especially essentializing myths about African American women, Butler portrays fluctuating identities and challenges established ideas of race and gender. In the sections where Dana accounts for her life in the present and the near present, she is depicted as an independent woman who attempts to resist the pressure from the outside world. Her gender identity may be said to defy contemporary expectations of femininity as she prefers short hair, barely owns a dress, and has shortened her name Edana to Dana, which is considered to be a gender-neutral name. Moreover, instead of submitting to society's gender roles in general and her family's expectations in particular, she follows her own instincts. Although she studied for a while to become a nurse, a secretary, or

a teacher, which her aunt and uncle demanded if they were to support her, she decided to drop out of school in order to pursue her career as a writer. As Angelyn Mitchell observes, Dana demonstrates her independency and free will by "[c]hoosing to define herself instead of accepting the definitions of others" (54). However, the novel shows that there is a penalty for transgressing the boundaries of social norms; as a woman who refuses to live in accordance with hegemonic gender roles, Dana must suffer the consequences.

Her position as an unpublished author reflects the situation of many African American women writers during the 1960s and 1970s before the emergence of Black feminist discourse. Being a woman in a market mainly dominated by men makes it particularly difficult to sell her stories. Not only can she barely afford to buy her own food or pay rent; she seems to be isolated from the outside world and expresses loneliness. The uncertainty of her future and her lack of feeling of belonging suggest how Dana is caught in a liminal state, reflecting her marginalized position as a black woman in society at large. Kevin recognizes her in-betweenness during their first meeting, accusing her of "sleep-walking" during the day and of looking like "a zombie" (53), evoking the image of a ghost – caught between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Dana admits that the only time she is "fully awake, fully alive" is during the night, when she is "busy working on [her] novel" (53), which may suggest how her writing involves her own self-construction, and that she can only be fully alive when defining herself and her own reality. So far, Dana has only written short stories, yet she aspires to finish her novel. While her short stories suggest fragmentation, her novel indicates unification and completion. This telling symbolism of fragmentation and aspiration for wholeness may suggest the protagonist's ambiguous sense of self and what she desires to become – her novel representing a unified self. Dana, who works in an underpaid, part-time job during daytime, also works unpaid, fulltime during nighttime. The comparison may be said to demonstrate

Dana's dualistic and unfulfilled identity in her twentieth-century environment, and to suggest how nighttime and solitude provide a space for reflection and healing. In order to become fully alive in her current social context, however, Dana must come to terms with history and the roots of her existence, which are necessary components in her identity-formation. Accordingly, her writing depends on how knowledge of her familial history impacts her sense of self in the present. Because Butler offers her protagonist a ticket to her ancestral past by means of time travel, Dana gains first-hand experience with chattel slavery which provides her with the knowledge and awareness which that can help to fill in the gaps of her novel and, by implication, her own life and selfhood as a late twentieth-century African American woman. The necessity to face the past and its implications for the present becomes even more important by Dana's choice of marrying a white man in a society which is still influenced by racist and sexist ideologies.

The portrayal of Dana and Kevin as equals challenges social power structures which place the black woman at the bottom of the social hierarchy and the white man at its top. The reader learns that the two met at an auto-parts warehouse where Dana believed Kevin worked as a "stock helper or some such bottom-of-the-ladder type" (53), which convinced her that he was not her superior. When Kevin asks about her zombie state, accusing her of being "high on something," Dana assures herself that "he had no authority over [her]" and that she "didn't owe him any explanations" (53). She later learns that they are not only both aspiring writers, who have resisted their families' expectations with regard to pursuing a "respectable" career, but that they are also both orphans and presumably equally "lonely and out of place" (52). Her account of Kevin's stature enforces the image of the two as equals, Kevin being "no taller than [Dana's] own five-eight so that [she] found [herself] looking directly into the strange eyes" (54).

After learning about Kevin's struggle as a writer, Dana refers to him as "a kindred spirit" who, like herself, was "crazy enough to keep on trying" (57). Accordingly, they are portrayed as soul mates, sharing personal traits which are self-constructed and variable. Thus the novel underlines its critique of socially constructed binaries which are based on fixed, biological differences, as well as literary representations which create and recreate conceptions of such differences. The depiction of Dana and Kevin as kindred readily erases any division of "races," suggesting that there is no difference between "black" and "white." The reader learns that Dana is a black woman in the latter part of the second chapter named "The Fire," during her second visit in antebellum Maryland, whereas the third chapter, "The Fall," reveals that Kevin is white. Accordingly, skin color is initially presented as insignificant, or non-existent. However, the novel shows how both history and the characters' immediate surroundings challenge their equality. Despite their apparent love for each other, Dana's accounts of their relationship in present-day California reveal signs of tension and prove the futility of indifference to history.

The two are aspiring writers; while Kevin is selling novels, Dana has only written short stories. Learning about Kevin's accomplishments as a writer affects Dana who feels "a terrible mixture of envy and frustration" (54). Kevin is also eleven years older than Dana and their age difference is highlighted by his prematurely grey hair. During their first meeting, Dana notices how Kevin, despite being the same height as she, was also "muscular" and "well built" (54). Moreover, when she meets Kevin's "pale…strange eyes," Dana "look[s] away startled, wondering whether [she] had really seen anger there" (54).

Dana's perception of Kevin's seemingly angry look makes her wonder about his importance in the warehouse, thinking that "maybe he had some authority" after all (54). While Kevin's muscular body may be said to denote masculinity, his "pale…almost colorless" eyes (54) can be seen as "racial markers" of "whiteness." Dana's reaction may

therefore imply an underlying insecurity with regard to her own social status as a black woman when she associates masculinity and "whiteness" with authority. Although she appears to suppress any notion of anxiety, her environment testifies to prevalent tensions pertaining to race relations in general and multi-cultural relationships in particular.

Underscoring prevailing racist attitudes and sexual norms, Dana's female colleague once remarked "with typical slave-market candor that [Kevin] and [she] were 'the weirdest-looking couple' she had ever seen" (57). Unaware that her words will backfire when she confronts her familial history, Dana had told her colleague that "she hadn't seen much" (57). Her nonchalant references to slavery may be said to highlight the historical "amnesia" that pervades the nation at large, yet the reactions she and Kevin receive as a couple reveal the lingering effects of the past. A male colleague refers to the two with a "chocolate and vanilla porn" (56) wisecrack, assuming that they are going to write pornography together. His facetious remarks demonstrate how he associates Kevin and Dana's union with eroticism, which calls to mind what Spillers refers to as "pornotroping" (67) – a term she employs to explain the brutal violation of African bodies by white male supremacy from the outset of the transatlantic slave trade.

In his article, "Pornotropes," Alexander G. Weheliye offers a delineation of Spiller's composition of the words *porno* and *trope*:

> Originally, *porno* signified prostitute and in the ancient Greek context from whence it sprung, the term referred to female slaves who were sold expressly for prostitution. Also a derivation from Greek, *trope*, according to Hayden White (1987), refers to 'turn' and 'way' or 'manner'. Later, by way of Latin, *trope* is aligned with 'figure of speech'. (72)

Quoting White, Weheliye points out how "'tropes are deviations from literal, conventional, or "proper" language use…it is not only a deviation *from* one possible, proper, meaning, but also a deviation *towards* another meaning'" (72). In this regard, Weheliye argues that "[i]n pornotroping, the double rotation White identifies at the heart of the trope figures the remainder of law and violence linguistically, staging the simultaneous sexualization and brutalization of the (female) slave" (72).

With regard to the transatlantic slave trade, Spillers explains how "the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality [and]…at the same time – in stunning contradiction – the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being* for the captor." As a result of this objectification, "the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of 'otherness,'" and "as a category of 'otherness,' the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping" (67).

In order to illustrate the difference between the "captive" and "liberated" body, Spillers makes a distinction between body and flesh, where the latter denotes a sheer lack of "social conceptualization" in addition to a particular vulnerability to symbolic inscriptions. Pornotroping is thus a kind of symbolic "marking and branding" (67) of the flesh, whereby the enslaved body is both objectified and sexualized. Within the institution of slavery the process of pornotroping served to justify and perpetuate the sexual exploitation of female slaves by white slaveholders. Because they were perceived as animalistic, promiscuous and sexually available, black women became prey for white men and victims of their masters' primitive lust.

For Dana's female colleague, a relationship between a white man and a black woman does not seem "normal," while her male colleague associates it with pornography. By implying how "blackness" and femininity bear the stigma inscribed on enslaved female

bodies, the novel demonstrates how the degrading images of black women's sexuality have outlived the institution and haunt "the national imaginary" (Rushdy 2). The impetus to deconstruct the various myths about African American women is evident in Butler's novel. Provoked by her co-workers' attitudes, Dana reveals how she chooses to ignore them by enjoying the thought of her and Kevin as a couple. However, As Missy Dehn Kubitschek observes; "*Kindred* implies…that no individually negotiated contract can cancel or transcend the social context" (28). Thus the novel demonstrates the tension underlying the utopian vision of the characters' union, and the dangers of undermining, or forgetting, the historical past.

Confronting the Family Secret of Slavery

Significantly, Butler's protagonist-narrator is confronted with her familial past and her mixed-blood heritage having married a white man. While Dana and Kevin have reached a milestone in their lives, the same can be said of the nation since the characters' union marks both America's bicentennial as well as the decade after interracial marriage was declared constitutional in America. Thus the time is ripe both for the novel's characters and the country to come to terms with the past which has formed the present. Dana's lack of knowledge about her familial history reflects the situation of many African Americans during the late 1970s. As slavery disrupted families and generations, its descendants were left with only pieces of knowledge about their roots; some simply refused to accept a slave past and tried "to grow without roots at all" (Rushdy 19). However, the decade of the seventies was simultaneously marked by an increased interest in slavery and genealogy, spurred in part by the publication of Haley's *Roots* and its subsequent adaptation into a popular televised mini-series. Although his novel was seen as an important contribution to the discourse on the African American family

and inspired many African Americans to search for their own roots, Haley was criticized by black feminists who condemned his exclusion of the black female experience. *Kindred* may therefore be seen as a response to *Roots* in that it brings the female legacy of slavery to the fore and problematizes black women's position at the intersection of racism and sexism.

Because Dana is an orphan who lost both her parents at an early age, she knows little or nothing about her family history. The closest family members are her aunt, uncle, and cousin, and the only evidence of her genealogy is a list of names written in her Grandmother's family bible. Before she faces her past, Dana knows about her ancestors' existence, but not that their names in the bible conceal family secrets, unspeakable suffering and trauma. She also admits that the names have been off her mind for a long time, which suggests that she has tried to embrace the future before getting to know her past. Butler underscores the necessity of confronting history by how Dana and Kevin evade the subject of family; "…it occurred to me [Dana] that one of the reasons [Kevin's] proposal surprised me was that we had never talked much about our families, about how his would react to me and mine to him" (109).

Revealing how she undermines the implications of the past, Dana tells Kevin that she fears her uncle and aunt will not approve of their relationship, claiming that they are old, and that "their ideas don't have very much to do with what's going on now" (110). Her aunt accepts their marriage, but only because their children would be light-skinned, having always thought her niece to be "a little too 'highly visible'" (111). Her aunt's "approval" proposes assimilating to the dominant by way of becoming less "visible" as an African American. Dana's uncle, on the other hand, feels rejected by his niece and is unable to forgive her for marrying a white man. His reaction may be said to reflect Black power ideologies, including fear of emasculation by white male superiority and a grudge against white men for raping "their women."

Kevin is surprised to learn that his sister is no less approving, though he claims that she has been influenced by her prejudiced husband. Showing his despair, Kevin tells Dana how his sister now "lives in a big house in La Canada and quotes clichéd bigotry at [him] for wanting to marry [Dana]" (111). By referring to contemporary racism as cliché, Kevin, like Dana, may be said to undermine the status quo of American society and the necessity of remembering history and its meaning for the present. Although affected by their families' disapproval, the two agree to "pretend [they] haven't got relatives" and elope to Las Vegas to get married. As though to underscore Dana's plight to overcome the restrictive forces of her environment, including controlling her own sexuality, she returns from her honey-moon finding out that "[o]ne of her stories had finally made it" (112). Thus Butler offers hope for Dana and her marriage, yet the novel provides evidence that despite the characters' love for each other, they still struggle to fit into one another's lives and into their contemporary environment.

While the couple is moving into their new home and Kevin suffers from a writer's block, Dana tries to provide him with new ideas by handing him "a stack of nonfiction" (12). In response, Kevin gives her a despiteful look which, Dana wants to believe, "wasn't as malevolent as it seemed" (13), yet she reveals her insecurity by pointing out how his eyes "made him seem distant and angry," and that "[h]e used them to intimidate people" (13). Her description of Kevin's eyes indicates how she associates them with authority, and her assumption that he uses them as a means of intimidation may be said to imply her underlying insecurity. Significantly, the scene is followed by the protagonist's dizziness and nausea before she eventually disappears from the living room and finds herself in antebellum Maryland, having been called by her white ancestor, Rufus.

Upon her first arrival in antebellum Maryland, Dana is impelled to save Rufus from drowning in a river, still unaware that the young boy is her distant ancestor. She subsequently

has her first encounter with his father, Tom Weylin, and suddenly "[finds] [herself] looking down the barrel of the longest rifle [she] [has] ever seen," fearing for her life (14). Accordingly, her first encounter with a white man in the antebellum South poses a threat to her life, underscoring the shock of confronting the realities of a traumatic family history; she is literally forced to face the truth at gunpoint. Her fear uncannily transports her back to the present, where Kevin is "frozen" with terror and confusion, having seen his wife vanish before his eyes. Accordingly, Dana's first involuntary trip to the past seem to have been triggered by her ambivalence to Kevin's masculinity and "whiteness" as she is forced to confront her familial history and the source of her anxiety.

Moreover, her first encounter with Rufus marks an important threshold in her life in the present as she has not only entered a partnership with Kevin but also shares a new home with him. As it is also Dana's twenty-sixth birthday, her time travel may be seen as representing a kind of rebirth, or a rite of passage, involving a journey towards historical – and self-awareness. As Kubitschek observes; "The new house suggests the convergence of two individuals, and the birthday, of course, indicates the emergence of a new or modified self." The critic further suggests that "before [Dana and Kevin] can meld their possessions, much less their beings, into a coherent relationship, they must confront larger issues, the heritages of both races and both genders" (28). Thus the moment also symbolizes the threshold reached by the nation at large, which requires a re-examination of the historical past as a means to confront contemporary issues pertaining to racial and gender oppression.

Unlike other works of science fiction, such as H. G Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) for example, Dana's time travel does not involve a machine. As a witness to his wife's disappearance and reappearance, Kevin proves that Dana's time traveling is both a psychological and physical journey. Although he tries to rationalize the event, suggesting it is a mere dream or a hallucination, he admits to its vividness: "It happened, I saw it. You

vanished and you reappeared. Facts" (16). Thus the novel may be said to propose the inseparability of body and mind; in order to fully understand her ancestors' lives, Dana must witness both the psychological and physical violation of African Americans during slavery. As Sherryl Vint suggests, "Dana's body is the mechanism of her time travel. At the moment of transfer, she feels dizziness suggestive of sea-sickness and recalling the middle passage: it is a journey taken to serve someone else's needs" (249). This emphasis on embodied experience also demonstrates a return to nineteenth-century slave testimonies and the reliance of formerly enslaved African American bodies as physical evidence of the profound injustice done to the people of color during slavery. Dana's time traveling can therefore be seen as a reminder of how historiography alone falls short of representing the trauma of the past. As will be seen, the protagonist's twentieth-century book-knowledge about slavery neither prepares her for the reality, nor is it sufficient for her survival as a female slave.

Dana's attempt to explain the vividness of her experience to Kevin may suggest an allusion to Dana as representing black feminist discourse and Kevin as representing the master narrative, which is highlighted by how the characters are both aspiring writers. Kevin, who is both white and male, in addition to having already written a novel, may be said to symbolize the master narrative's reliance on coherence, linearity, and objectivity. Dana's short stories, on the other hand, suggest multiplicity and fragmented histories. Thus Dana may be said to represent the view that history is comprised of multiple experiences and perspectives. Her effort to convince Kevin that her experience was as real as his may therefore be seen as a critique of hegemonic presentations and representations of history which claim to be objective: "…I know what I saw, and what I did – my facts. They're no crazier than yours" (16).

Kevin, who remains skeptical of his wife's experience, simply urges Dana to "[l]et herself pull away from it" (16-17), suggesting an attempt to let go of the past and, by

implication, Dana's familial history. However, as he has not had the same experience, he is not equally affected. Having showered away the visible signs of her traumatic experience – the mud from the river – Dana continues to feel anxious and insecure: "Rufus and his parents had still not quite settled back and become the 'dream' Kevin wanted them to be. They stayed with me, shadowy and threatening" (18). Thus the novel underscores the haunting presence of the past which is initially only felt by Dana who has been confronted with its horrors.

Dana's time travels and her traumatic experiences in the past call to mind Hirsch's idea of postmemory. Hirsch describes postmemory as an intergenerational transmission of memories which results in a "response of the second generation to the trauma of the first" (8). It is a process that involves narratives and images of cultural or collective trauma that are so powerful and monumental that they become "memories in their own right" (Hirsch 9). Descendents of ancestors that have experienced cultural or collective trauma may therefore be said to "remember" these experiences as if they were their own. Although Hirsch's work on postmemory primarily focuses on the visual representations of the Second World War and the Holocaust, it is nevertheless applicable to any context and discourse that involves cultural trauma. Dana may be said to remember the collective trauma of American slavery through *familiar* memory which is primarily based on information in history-books and the media, whereas she gains access to *familial* memory through her great-grandmother, Alice. Hirsch's theory offers a way to illustrate how Dana may be said to respond to her maternal ancestor's belated trauma, whereby her time travel forces her to become a first-generation witness and victim of slavery.

Before she allows the traumatic experience to fade from her memory, Dana abruptly returns to antebellum Maryland only moments after her first encounter with Rufus. During her second visit, she not only learns that she has crossed both time and space but also that Rufus is her great-grandfather and the son of a slaveholder. Her reaction to the discovery is a set of

questions that arise when family secrets of slavery are disclosed: "Alice Greenwood. How would she marry this boy? Or would it be marriage? And why hadn't someone in my family mentioned that Rufus Weylin was white?" (28). Still unaware of the unspeakable trauma and shame that lie hidden in the past, Dana assumes that most information about her grandmother's life must have died with her. She wonders, however, if her white male ancestor might still be "vaguely alive in the memory of [her] family" because of the family bible which was still in the hands of her uncle. Her uncle's reaction to her choice of husband may therefore suggest his awareness of their mixed-blood heritage and concurrent sense of shame. The protagonist's confusion with regard to the relation between Alice and Rufus sets the premise of the novel since it serves as a point of comparison for Dana's relationship with Kevin. Before Dana can fully fathom her subjectivity and sexuality, she must first understand how her maternal ancestors' sexuality was controlled by the patriarchic institution of slavery and its agents.

By inserting Dana into the life of her great-grandmother, Butler forces her protagonist to experience what it means to be an object of exploitation on the basis of skin color as well as sex. During her second visit in nineteenth-century Maryland, Dana acknowledges her vulnerability as a black woman by stating that "[t]he possibility of meeting a white adult here frightened [her], more than the possibility of street violence ever had at home" (33). Her reference to street violence in twentieth-century California serves as an example of how the novel draws parallels between the past and the present, underscoring the prevailing threat of violence in a racist and sexist society. Thus the novel also responds to the pressing need in the 1970s to address the long history of sexual violence against African American women, which has resulted in the ongoing tension around relations between black women and white men. In antebellum Maryland, Dana comes close to being sexually violated merely because she is a

woman and black, which the novel underscores by blurring Dana's identity with that of maternal ancestor.

The Threat of Rape and the Awareness of White Male Authority

Following her first encounter with Rufus, Dana experiences lack of control and is afraid to return to the same place and find herself "standing naked among strangers" or "appear somewhere else naked and totally vulnerable" (18). Her fear is justified as it foreshadows her next visit to the past and her encounter with a white patroller who attempts to rape her. Before this traumatic experience, Dana seeks refuge in Alice's mother's cabin, persecuted by the thought that "[p]aperless blacks were fair game for any white" (34) in the antebellum South. However, her lack of slave experience makes her underestimate her environment, which is seen when she notices a group of white men on the road and acknowledges the uncanny feeling of both fear and relief. Although she admits that they might be a danger to her, she resolves that "they did not seem as threatening as the dark shadowy woods with its strange sounds, its unknowns" (35). She gets a reality check when she arrives near Alice's mother's cabin where the white patrollers have come to take Alice's father back to Weylin's plantation and punish him for his escape.

Underscoring the coercive regulations of slave sexuality, Alice's parents are dragged naked from their bed, upon which the father receives a horrifying whipping before he is taken away as a runaway slave. Although Alice's father is a slave, her mother is free, which means that her children also are free since they follow the condition of the mother. The current incident may therefore demonstrate Weylin's disapproval of his male slave's potential fathering of children who would be free instead of being his property, which underscores how female slaves were exploited as breeders whose function was to increase the master's "stock."

Accordingly, Dana, like Alice, is forced to witness the father's brutal whipping, as well as the patrollers' harassment of the mother who is standing naked, exposed to "obscenities" and laughter (36).

Shocked by the unspeakable violence, Dana compares what she sees to media images of the twentieth century, and is forced to realize that she is no longer protected by the television screen or the knowledge of its staged performances, as she is now faced with reality:

> I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard their well-rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. I was probably less prepared for the reality than the child crying not far from me. (36)

The current scene offers an example of how the novel problematizes the ability to fully grasp the past – and cultural trauma in particular – without the bodily experience. Dana's emphasis on bodily senses and compulsions, such as the smell of sweat and the urge to vomit, readily highlights the contrast. As Marisa Parham suggests, the emphasis on embodied experience as a means to fully understand a traumatic history further challenges "the very idea of reading and writing about the past" (1323). While the novel directs attention to the impossibility of reproducing reality through literary construction, its descriptive scenes of violence may serve as a reality check to the reader. As Lisa Woolfork proposes, "Butler both claims and critiques textual representation, retaining its important value as a repository of memory and experience while rejecting the impulse to completely substitute these depictions for empathic forms of connection with the past" (29).

Dana's references to twentieth-century representations of slavery reveal how repeated exposure to violent images may have the effect of normalizing them, thus desensitizing us to

horror and perhaps also exhaust our capacity for sympathy (Hirsch 7). By forcing Dana, who seems to be desensitized by the excess of visual and bookish representations of history, to experience the brutal reality of chattel slavery first-hand, Butler also invites the reader to adopt her protagonist's growing critical awareness. In contrast to her earlier assumption that the patrollers were merely a group of men "out on a leisurely ride in the middle of the night," Dana now describes them as "whites who rode through the night…breaking in doors and beating and otherwise torturing black people" (36-37). By describing the patrollers as the "[f]orerunners of the Ku Klux Klan" (37), the narrator also directs attention to the continuing manifestations of racism, violence, and ideologies of white male supremacy.

After the patrollers have left the cabin, Dana reveals her maternal ancestor's vulnerability: "In a place like this, how could the woman be sure of anything" (40). Her new awareness of skin color and her growing anxiety towards white men renders an afterthought: "And then there was history. Rufus and Alice would get together somehow" (40). As if answering her ponderings, Dana subsequently encounters the patroller who has come back to satisfy his sexual urges. Accordingly, Dana is forced to learn "[t]he appropriation and alternation of female sexuality by the institution of slavery and its agents…that the institution of slavery commodifies Black female sexuality in its attempt to perpetuate itself and to satisfy the lust of its agents" (Mitchell 47). Highlighting how Dana assumes her maternal ancestors' fates, the patroller confuses her with Alice's mother and concludes that she will "do as well as her sister" (42). Accordingly, Dana's familial resemblance with her maternal ancestor leads to her misfortune as she becomes the substitute target of the patroller's violence and lasciviousness.

In a desperate attempt to escape the punitive man, Dana realizes the extent of the danger she is in, admitting that she now sees "darker denser woods" (42) as a site of refuge and the presence of a white man an ominous threat. Dana becomes the target of the

inconceivable violence she witnessed earlier: "I had never been beaten that way before – would never have thought I could absorb so much punishment without losing consciousness" (42). Realizing her powerlessness, she admits to her lack of experience and limited courage: "My squeamishness belonged in another age, but I'd brought it along with me" (42). However, her fear of dying eventually saves her from rape, following which she returns to the present. Although she escapes sexual violation, the incident becomes "a stark reminder that she and all of her sisters in bondage are sexually vulnerable" (Mitchell 47).

Dana's visits in the antebellum South serve to evoke fear which she brings with her to the present. Having escaped the attempted rape, she wakes up in her own bed in California and immediately starts to panic by "the face of a man" (43), which turns out to be her husband's. As the mere presence of a man is enough to bring back the traumatic memories, Dana's reaction indicates more anxiety to come. Tellingly, she moves from the threat of sexual violence in antebellum Maryland to her own twentieth-century bedroom, the site of sexual intimacy between her and her husband. This transition may be said to transform their home – and their bedroom in particular – into a site of insecurity, where Dana no longer feels safe for fear that "it could happen again – like it could happen anytime" (17). Kevin reveals his own insecurity after his wife has mistaken him for her rapist, asking her if "[he] look[s] like someone [she] can come home to from where [she] may be going" (51). Proving that she still sees him as a kindred spirit and not a threat, Dana assures Kevin that she needs him. At that time, however, she does not know that Kevin will accompany her on her next time travel and that he will be stranded in the past when Dana returns to the present again.

The Oppressor and the Oppressed

With Kevin's travel with Dana to the past, Butler demonstrates that the slave past is a collective history which must be confronted by the nation at large – by African Americans as well as white Americans. Also, meaningful relationships in the present are only possible if the involved parties confront their past and prepare for future challenges in a society which continues to construct power relations by way of binaries. In the antebellum South, Kevin and Dana are inevitably forced to live in accordance with nineteenth-century laws and norms and must therefore assume the roles of master and slave. By emphasizing the performativity of these roles, the novel demonstrates how "[t]he body *is* a historical situation…and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation (Butler 272; emphasis in the original). As Judith Butler suggests, "the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities" (272; emphasis in the original). Accordingly, the novel appears to support the theory that social identities are active and variable as opposed to fixed and grounded in biology. Having assumed the role of Kevin's slave in front of Rufus's father, Dana nevertheless forgets to behave as an "inferior" when she meets Weylin's gaze: "At first I stared back. Then I looked away, remembering that I was supposed to be a slave. Slaves lowered their eyes respectfully…Or at least that was what my books said" (66). As Woolfork observes,

> …the phrase "that was what my books said" emphasizes Dana's dependence on books as the scripts for her performance of slavery, and illustrates the social and behavioral constructions of slavery: Dana does not "naturally" modify her gaze but does so because she has read about this socially prescribed behavior. (30)

Thus the novel demonstrates how the institution of slavery controls and conditions the behavior of enslaved African Americans whose "racial" identities are performed under duress.

Although Dana tries to preserve her late twentieth-century identity in her acting as a slave on the Weylin plantation, she also realizes the constraining forces of her environment and the dangers of underestimating them: "The whipping served its purpose as far as I was concerned. It scared me, made me wonder how long it would be before I made a mistake that would give someone reason to whip me. Or had I already made that mistake?" (92). The experience and threat of violence progressively force Dana to become more cautious, afraid of behaving in a manner deserving of punishment.

Because she is not only forced to act as if she were Kevin's slave but also pretends to be his concubine, Dana experiences the double degradation: as a slave and sexual property. However, in contrast to her maternal ancestors, she is able to retain her integrity and sense of self since her husband still treats her as his wife and not as his "sex slave" or "breeder." To underscore the difference between Dana and other enslaved women on the plantation the novel directs attention to slave children who resemble Weylin, indicating how Rufus's father appropriates his female slaves' bodies, ostensibly as a means to increase the value of his property and to satisfy his lasciviousness. Dana underscores her privileged position in relation to other slave women on the plantation by expressing how her sleeping arrangements with Kevin "gave [her] a chance to preserve a little of 1976 amid the slaves and slave-holders" (92), suggesting that their intimacy helps her maintain her twentieth-century subjectivity and sense of volition. "In matters of sexuality," Mitchell proposes, "Butler portrays Dana as an empowered agent in her contemporary environment…Her twentieth-century environment does not suppress, commodify, or abuse [her] sexuality" (46). Although she controls her sexuality with Kevin, Dana is not shielded by her nineteenth-century environment, including the views and judgments of the Weylins and other slaves.

Rufus's father, who presumably knows about Kevin's sexual relationship with Dana, proves his attitude to black women by the way he looks at Dana when he catches her in the

hallway: “His eyes swept over me like a man sizing up a woman for sex, but I got no message of lust from him” (90). Weylin’s gaze underscores Dana’s status as sexual property – as an object of exploitation – and not a woman in her own right. His subsequent inquiry about her reproductive abilities demonstrates how he reduces her to someone who may “breed” him more slaves, with which the text underscores the complexity of motherhood for enslaved women whose offspring automatically becomes the master’s property. Offended by Weylin’s inquiry, Dana refuses to provide an answer, thinking to herself that “[her] fertility was none of his business, anyway,” yet her silence also indicates her fear of speaking her mind, in other words her inability to defend herself as a slave.

While Weylin appears to know about and accept Kevin and Dana’s “concubinage,” his wife’s reaction when she becomes suspicious of their affair illustrates how black women are blamed for their masters’ transgressions, which Valerie Martin’s *Property* explores. Rufus’s mother, Margaret, who seemingly strives to live in accordance with society’s expectations of “true” (white) womanhood, accuses Dana of being a “filthy black whore,” sternly reminding her of her “Christian house” (93). The mistress’s reaction readily reflects the nineteenth-century ideal of femininity which, according to Venetria K. Patton, required women “to maintain the four cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (xvi). As Margaret’s degradation of Dana shows, the emphasis on chastity stands in great contrast to the perception of black women’s supposedly inherent promiscuity. By illuminating how the patriarchic institution of slavery controls and violates enslaved women’s sexuality, the novel reveals how these totalizing images of women – both black and white – are socially constructed so as to benefit white male authority. With reference to Margaret’s reaction to Kevin and Dana’s shared accommodations, Mitchell suggests that “Butler gestures toward the hypocrisies of slavery, as well as to the way in which Black women became the scapegoat of such practices.” The critic argues that “Dana bears the burden of misreading because she is a

Black woman without power in the system of patriarchy" (49). Although Dana is impelled to defend her integrity against Margaret's insults, she admits how "[her] memory of the whip" prevents her from resorting to resistance. Thus the fear of violence inhibits her from actively disavowing misconceptions about her choices and behavior. What ultimately bothers Dana most, however, is Weylin's acceptance of liaisons between white men and female slaves, which he proves by smiling and winking at Dana when he catches her on her way out of Kevin's bedroom. Dana reveals how Weylin's reaction affects her self-perception: "I felt almost as though I really was doing something shameful, happily playing whore for my supposed owner. I went away feeling uncomfortable, vaguely ashamed" (97).

Although Dana claims that she and Kevin are somewhat protected by their twentieth-century subjectivities, she admits that their nineteenth-century environment is becoming increasingly and disturbingly familiar. "The ease" with which they seem to adjust to antebellum society makes Dana realize how "easily people could be trained to accept slavery" (101). By familiarizing the otherwise unfamiliar and unimaginable slave past, Butler emphasizes the importance of critical awareness with regard to the dangers of conforming to social structures based on domination and subordination. Moreover, Kevin's historical privilege of being both white and male shields him from most of the horror his wife is forced to witness and experience. Thus Dana sees a need to raise her husband's critical awareness by trying to make him understand her experience as a slave.

While Kevin reminds his wife that "[they're] in the middle of history" and that they "surely can't change it" (100), Dana is starting to develop a sense of responsibility to the slave community, especially to those she has already formed bonds with. As Mitchell observes; "In the nineteenth century, Dana learns to accept her communal responsibility although she is technically not one of Weylin's enslaved African Americans." Moreover, despite her being "self-conscious about belonging…[Dana's] color – her sign – guarantees her belonging" (56).

Thus Dana not only tries to mentor Rufus in the hope that he will not become a replica of his father, but also risks her life to educate the enslaved children, Nigel and Carrie. As a means to ensure the survival of African American families on the plantation, Dana's main mission entails conditioning Rufus into treating people of color with respect, reminding him that they are human beings, not movable property to be bought and sold. In contrast to Dana's isolated life and lack of belonging in her twentieth-century milieu, her visits in antebellum Maryland force her to learn "the supreme importance of the African American community," and thus she "earnestly invests herself in its continuance" (Mitchell 56). However, she also learns that she has to suffer for her investments when Weylin catches her during a reading lesson with Nigel and Carrie, which results in Dana's brutal whipping. Believing she will die from the pain, Dana disappears before Kevin is able to touch her and therefore returns to the present without him. As a consequence, Kevin is stranded in the past for five years, which suggests that the two characters must face their histories separately as a test to their relationship. Accordingly, Dana is forced to relive her maternal ancestor's fate and to face the truth about Alice's relationship with Rufus.

"One Woman:" Controlling Black Female Sexuality

On Dana's fourth trip to antebellum Maryland, she begins to doubt the effect of her efforts with her white male ancestor, fearing that he might have been marked by his environment, his father in particular. Arriving in the aftermath of a dispute between Rufus and what turns out to be Alice's husband, Isaac, Dana realizes that her white male ancestor may have raped, or made an attempt to rape, her great-grandmother: "The girl, her torn dress. If everything was as it seemed, Rufus had earned his beating and more" (117-18). Affirming Dana's suspicions, Alice explains how Rufus had "wanted to be more friendly than [she] did" (120), and that he

had tried to sell Isaac to prevent her from marrying him. As the novel juxtaposes Dana's twentieth-century condition with that of her maternal ancestor in the antebellum South, the current scene readily demonstrates the contrasts.

Rufus's attempt to control Alice by way of rape shows how "Alice's desires are unmerited and unmediated by the institution of slavery which allows, sustains, and encourages the alteration and appropriation of enslaved Black women's sexuality" (Mitchell 51). Dana is estranged from her closest family in the present because of her choice of marrying a white man, yet she still has the opportunity and right to control her own sexuality. Although both women are independent individuals with desires of their own, the laws and norms of Alice's environment methodically inhibit her from being a subject in her own right. As Mitchell suggests, Dana's female ancestor, who is born a freewoman, "seems to possess an awareness of her individuality and of her free will when she rejects Rufus's sexual advances and chooses to 'marry' Isaac" (51). However, Rufus readily violates her free will and integrity by exploiting his privileged social status as a white man to satisfy his own desires: he treats Alice as an object to be possessed rather than a woman or a lover.

Accordingly, Butler demonstrates how black women were degendered by the slaveholding institution because they were regarded as subhuman. As Patton observes, "[f]emale slaves were not recognized as women and mothers; they were merely sexed property" (12). However, Rufus also shows how he cares for Alice in his own way, admitting to Dana that he would have attempted to marry her had "[he] lived in [Dana's] time" (124) where it was legal. By showing Rufus's affection for Alice, including signs of humbleness, the novel demonstrates how his racist and sexist attitude is culturally conditioned. His fluctuating identity highlights the dynamics between individual and society; although he is capable to feel himself equal to both Alice and Dana, his perceptions and manners are influenced by dominant ideologies. Dana even reveals her fleeting judgment of Weylin,

claiming that he was "[j]ust an ordinary man who sometimes did the monstrous things his society said were legal and proper" (134). While she helps Alice and Isaac to escape, wondering whether her maternal ancestor might already be pregnant with Hagar, Dana remains intent to influence Rufus's attitude, aware that the two would need "to make compromises" (121), because each depends on the other for their existence.

Having spent about a week in the Weylin household, Dana realizes the limits of her influence when Rufus and Nigel return from town "with what was left of Alice" (145). Because Rufus refuses to let Alice have her freedom and to choose a man other than him, let alone a slave, he exercises his power to destroy their relationship and their chances of starting a family. While Isaac is mutilated before he is sold down South, Alice is severely punished on her return and is forced into bondage by Rufus. Her transition from freedom to slavery highlights the parallel between her and Dana when the latter loses her rights as an independent twentieth-century woman whenever Rufus "calls" her to the past. Like the protagonist's time traveling, Alice's transition into bondage is also reminiscent of a rite of passage. Moreover, her injuries have left her helpless, disillusioned, and in constant need of nurture. As Mitchell observes, "Reverting to a state of infancy induced by trauma, Alice calls Dana 'Mama' (153) and looks to her for support and guidance" (52). Consequently, Dana becomes a kind of Mammy-figure to Alice, which foreshadows when Alice "mockingly and insultingly predicts that Dana will one day become the 'Mammy' of the plantation" (53). The stereotypical and negating image of the Mammy implies that black women are supposed to serve white needs as surrogate mothers to their enslavers' children.

Butler revises the historical myth of "Mammy" through her portrayal of Dana and her struggle to ameliorate the slave community's conditions. By nurturing and educating Rufus as if he were her own child, Dana hopes to prevent him from becoming an oppressor, which may in turn help to preserve African American families on the plantation. However, Dana reveals

how she bases her own perceptions on the historically constructed stereotype when she misjudges Sarah and her supposed lack of courage: "She had done the safe thing – had accepted a life of slavery because she was afraid. She was the kind of woman who might have been called 'mammy' in some other household" (145). Underscoring the futility of Dana's twentieth-century book-knowledge, she is forced to reconsider her quick judgment when witnessing Alice's brutal fate after her attempted escape.

Through her portrayal of Dana, Butler also deconstructs the stereotypical image of black women's immorality and excessive sexual appetite. While separated from Kevin, Dana is desired by Sam, one of the enslaved men on the plantation, she "adamantly declares that for her 'one husband is enough' (230), belying the supposed lasciviousness of enslaved Black women" (Mitchell 50). The novel rejects the stigmatization of African American women by revealing how enslaved women perceived themselves.

Caught in a position of utter powerlessness, Alice submits to Rufus's sexual demands because it appears to be safest in order to survive. Accordingly, she relinquishes herself to Rufus who readily claims her as his possession. Dana reveals how her twentieth-century subjectivity clouds her judgment of her maternal ancestor's condition by arguing that Alice's body is her own. Alice's foreboding answer demonstrates her helplessness: "Not mine, his. He paid for it, didn't he?" (167). However, the novel shows that in order "[t]o preserve her sense of self, Alice has to separate her body her spirit" (Mitchell 52). She does not love Rufus back and admits that she "wish[ed] [she] had the nerve to just kill him" (168). Thus she tries to resist her status as sexual property in her own way, even though her condition not only affects her body, but also her spirit: "She adjusted, became a quieter more subdued person. She didn't kill, but she seemed to die a little" (169). Alice's circumstances become worse when she loses two of her children in infancy, while the other two who survive are exploited by Rufus as a means "to control Alice's affection and sexual behavior toward him" (Mitchell

53). Thus Butler demonstrates how the patriarchic institution of slavery and its agents violated not only the bodies' of female slaves, but also the notion and practices of motherhood. Although Dana remains intent not to give up her body and accept her status as chattel, she is nevertheless forced to experience the brutal objectification and degradation of black womanhood. As Mitchell proposes,

> The most graphic example of sexual assault in *Kindred* occurs when Evan Fowler, the Weylin's overseer, viciously strikes Dana across her breasts to punish her for her failure to work efficiently in the field. This brutality inflicted on Dana's body signals how devalued she is as a woman, as a potential mother, as a human being. (48)

By constructing Dana and Alice as doubles, Butler underscores both women's victimization under white male authority. Rufus may be said to represent the prevailing racist and patriarchic ideologies which serve to oppress and claim dominance over black women, which is underscored by how he refers to Alice and Dana as "one woman" (228). Alice highlights his confusion by pointing out how "[h]e likes her in bed, and [Dana] out of bed… we're two halves of the same woman" (51). Mitchell argues that

> Rufus's conjoining of Dana and Alice might be interpreted as an example of the historically monolithic way of defining Black female identity, so pervasive in slavery because to acknowledge individuality or subjectivity would serve to eradicate slavery's very foundation. (51)

Dana's connection with her maternal ancestor is a way of showing how the slaveholding institution's definitions of black women still haunt present day society, as a symbolic return to slavery. By creating the two women as uncanny doubles, Butler demonstrates persistent ideologies which define and oppresses the "Other." The violation experienced by the female characters in the antebellum South also highlights the

interrelatedness of racism and sexism and the socio-political construction of power hierarchies which maintains white male domination.

The convergence of Alice and Dana is most clearly demonstrated in what may be said to be the turning-point of the novel: Rufus's attempt to rape Dana, and Dana's decision to use her knife and kill him. Like Alice, Dana becomes the victim of Rufus's sexual advances when he grows into "a man of his time" (242). After Alice's suicide, Dana has become her replacement as Rufus is now "being sorry and lonely and wanting [her] to take the place of the dead" (259). Accordingly, "[Rufus] violates the limits of [Dana's] personal freedom as well as the terms for their interaction as Dana had defined them" (Mitchell 50). Acknowledging her refusal to let herself be possessed by someone other than herself, Dana declares her self-possession by saving both her flesh and sense of self; "in a moment of clear objectification, Dana stabs [Rufus] to death" (Mitchell 50).

Dana's final act suggests a refusal to be controlled and defined by the past and demonstrates the contrast between her and Alice. While Alice's condition offered no hope, Dana's free will in her twentieth-century environment offers possibilities. As Sherryl Vint observes, *Kindred* "articulate[s] a need to overcome a mind/body split, represented as a subject/object dichotomy, in order for [Dana] to achieve healing and psychic wholeness" (245). Dana's arm being stuck in the wall of her California living room after her murder of Rufus may be said to demonstrate the protagonist's repossession of her body. She is no longer a liminal figure existing both in the past and the present, but has rather gained a sense of substance by reconnecting with and acknowledging her familial history. The loss of her arm both demonstrates a reminder of the violation experienced by her ancestors as well as the cost of confronting a traumatic past. In order to underscore how both characters have been marked by their confrontation with history, the novel reveals that Kevin has retained a scar on his forehead from his long stay in the past without Dana.

The Neo-Slave Narrative and the Master Narrative

Although the novel borrows narrative features from various genres, it is constructed as a neo-slave narrative because it adopts the original form of slave-narratives and problematizes the concept of freedom in contemporary American society against the background of slavery. The novel may be said to raise more questions than it answers, concealing more than it reveals, yet suggests no either/or solutions. Butler critiques hierarchical power relations in American society by exploring the tension between a myriad of culturally constructed binary oppositions, past/present, whiteness/blackness, male/female, master/slave. One may say that at the core of Butler's novel is a critique of power mechanisms that create and recreate African American women as the ultimate "Other" in order to maintain white superiority and patriarchy in the public as well as the private sphere. It is these defining mechanisms that have survived the great national "shame" called slavery and the persistence of social power structures that the novel critiques and rejects.

By means of blurring the boundaries of socio-politically constructed dichotomies, Butler attempts to dissolve their rigidity and resist their restraining hold. Moreover, the novel foregrounds its own place within historical discourse in general and black feminist discourse's contribution to historical knowledge and understanding in particular. Shedding light on the parts of African American women's history that have been ignored or undermined in the politics of race, gender, and family in America, the novel offers a complementary narrative to the hegemonic discourse.

The tension that the novel creates between Dana and Kevin may in some ways reflect the tension between neo-slave narratives and master narratives. Since the time of slavery until the present day the hegemonic discourse has claimed its authority in the writing of history, and with regard to slavery in particular. Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl*

(1861) was the first slave testimony to critique patriarchic structures by shedding light on the traumatic experiences in the lives of female slaves with regard to sexual exploitation in particular. Because of its sensitive topic and underlying critique, Jacobs' autobiography was for a long time dismissed as fiction, until historian Jean Fagan Yellin proved its authenticity in the late twentieth-century. The negative response that Jacobs' *Incidents* received reflects the ways in which the hegemonic discourse excludes alternative perspectives and exploits its authority to restrain forms of resistance.

Through the portrayal of a traumatized African American female subject, Butler brings into focus the consequences of power mechanisms that are meant to put the "Other" "in its place" – at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In the antebellum South, Dana becomes an easy target of rape and the mere acknowledgement of her vulnerability as a black woman evokes a feeling of shame. Throughout the novel, Dana's attempts to preserve her integrity are kept in check by the threat of physical or sexual violence by white male characters. Accordingly, her home in twentieth-century California becomes a site of vulnerability, and her marital intimacy is experienced as shame. However, her decision to resist Rufus's attempt of rape proves that she preserves her integrity and claims her own body.

Dana's first-person narrative claims authority that gives her the opportunity to share her own story and express resistance and define herself through words. As Kubitschek argues, a "personal narrative necessitates a construction or reconstruction of the self-as-character" and thus "offers power to the storyteller" (84). The protagonist's agency is underscored by how Kevin's time travel is contingent upon Dana's presence since she is his link to the past. Butler thus gives her protagonist a subject position, which suggests a critique of hegemonic objectification of African American women.

The fragmented structure of the novel may be said to reflect Dana's traumatic memories, which also demonstrates the difficulty of re-presenting and working through a traumatic past. Because trauma can be seen as a belated response of repetitive silence, the novel may be said to respond to the silence of the subject of the African American female experience, just like Dana responds to the silence of her maternal ancestors. Butler's novel and its narrator concurrently attempt to formulate and make sense of the past and its meaning in for the present. Moreover, its fragmented and non-linear narrative structure demonstrates a critique of hegemonic perceptions of linearity and historical progress, underscoring how the past is always a part of the present.

The novel's focus on a contemporary African American woman and her traumatic experience with familial history demonstrates that the history of slavery includes subsequent generations. Moreover, it is a collective history which must be confronted by the nation at large in order to resolve late twentieth-century issues of racial and gender oppression. Thus Dana and Kevin's union may be seen as a utopian image of American society, suggesting the necessity to erase racial boundaries and recognize all of American's citizens as "kindred." The couple also symbolizes the need to construct a shared history which suggests a co-operation between black feminist discourse and master narratives. As a contribution to black feminist discourse, Butler's neo-slave narrative also offers a complementary narrative to the master narrative. The exchange of perspectives between cultures may lead to a better understanding of history in general and the history of African American women in particular.

Chapter Two The Black Woman as the Ultimate "Other" and Sexual Object

Valerie Martin's *Property* is another novel of slavery which explores ideologies of white superiority and patriarchy with regard to power relations and miscegenation. The novel offers a revision of the politics of slavery by introducing the alternative and neglected perspective of the plantation mistress. Thus Martin reframes the theme of concubinage and the sexual exploitation of the female slave by presenting it from the point of view of the white woman who belongs to the "superior race" but is oppressed because of the gender role she has been assigned by patriarchic social structures. This narrative strategy not only helps to illuminate the various implications of a social system based on dominance and subordination but also serves to underscore the black woman's position at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The novel's protagonist-narrator is Manon Gaudet who is unhappily married to a slaveholder whose object of sexual desire is her African American maid, Sarah. Thus the reader is invited into a world of chattel slavery seen through the eyes of a racially prejudiced and bitter mistress whose hatred towards her husband and Sarah dominates the narrative. Despite the protagonist's experience of "imprisonment" in a loveless marriage, her cold-hearted attitude towards people of color in general and Sarah in particular rather serves to evoke sympathy with her black maid. Manon offers an unsympathetic and stereotypical representation of Sarah as the ultimate "Other," which is influenced by her jealousy and racial bias. Mitchell points out that "[p]erhaps the most suppressed text of the nineteenth century concerned the sexuality of the White woman" (78). Martin's novel brings this "text" to the surface, but most importantly it delineates the interrelatedness between the sexualities of the white mistress and the enslaved black woman. Within the familial sphere of a plantation household the novel constructs a hierarchy of power relations which manifest themselves as a result of racial and

gender discrimination. Thus the novel illuminates how the black woman, whose body becomes a site of violence and dominance, is doubly oppressed by both racism and sexism.

The Black Female Body as a Site of White Dominance

The novel focuses on the private sphere of a plantation household. The setting is therefore constructed in accordance with the social structures of antebellum society where women were restricted to the domestic sphere. As a woman in a patriarchic environment, Manon experiences suffocation by society at large and in her marriage in particular and yearns for independence from both; she even prays for her husband's death. The novel opens with the foreshadowing words; "It never ends" (Martin 3), and the reader subsequently gains a disturbing insight into plantation life, including Manon's husband's perverse and daily demonstrations of power over his slaves. Through the spyglass, which is mounted for the purpose of slave surveillance, Manon is observing a homoerotic game with a group of slave boys, staged by her husband. The boys are forced to swing by a rope, two at a time, into a nearby river, their bodies "displayed to [their master] in various positions," and rubbing against each other as they try to hang on. The purpose of the game, according to Manon, is tricking the slave boys into sexual arousal so that their master can beat them for it afterwards. "This is what proves they are brutes, [Gaudet] says, and have not the power of reason. A white man, knowing he would be beaten for it, would not be able to raise his member" (4).

Accordingly, Gaudet is trying to prove his slaves' presumed inherent animalistic nature and, by implication, their inferiority to the "white race" – of which he considers himself a proud member. The novel's representation of Gaudet's "experiment" offers a telling image of how slaveholders controlled their slaves' sexuality, and exemplifies how the bodies of African Americans – male and female – became victims of pornotroping which served to

justify the existence of a "superior race." The stigmatization of black men as lazy, sexualized brutes without human reason served as counter image to that of white men's intelligence, masculinity, and superior morality. The respective scene reveals how the slave boys' supposedly animalistic sexuality is staged and regulated by their master, rather than being an innate disposition; Gaudet induces them into sexual arousal only to punish them for it afterwards. With regard to the transatlantic slave trade, Spillers argues how enslaved female bodies and male bodies became "territor[ies] of cultural and political maneuver" (67). The violation of African Americans' human rights in addition to the various practices of torture on their bodies became expressions of white "cultural and political" power and privilege. The current example from the novel demonstrates how Gaudet exercises violence to assert his authority as a member of white supremacy.

Manon, however, reveals how the boys' "tumescence subsides as quickly as the master's rises" (4), implying how her husband, paradoxically, highlights his own authority and masculinity – his stick functioning as a metaphor for his own member. Rather than indicating Gaudet's superior morality over his slaves, the opening scene tellingly exposes his own barbarity by the way in which he stages violence for pleasure. As though to underscore her husband's perversity, Manon adds that if her husband could find one of the boys' mother, "and she's pretty, she will pay dearly for rearing an unnatural child" (4). Thus the novel brings into focus the common practice of the sexual violation of the enslaved woman, which was another "right" claimed by white slave owners. Repulsed by her husband's depravity, Manon is haunted by an "incredulous refrain: *This is my husband, this is my husband*" (5; italics in the original).

In the lines following the previous scene, Gaudet is in a bad mood because his strongest slave, Leo, has been severely whipped by Sutter, the overseer. Gaudet points out that "Sutter's real grievance…is that Leo has befriended a woman Sutter wants for himself"

(5). The comment suggests how Sutter and other white male characters in the novel want to control and regulate the slaves' desires for various purposes, including lasciviousness. Thus the novel introduces its central theme which revolves around sexual violence and the exploitation of the black woman's body in particular. The ease with which the narrative presents the issue of sexual relations between slaveholders and female slaves may also be said to underscore its commonness within the institution of slavery and within the novel. Shortly after Gaudet has let his anger out with regard to the incident with the overseer, he reveals the result of his own licentiousness, as well as the primary source of Manon's distress. He commands his wife's maid, Sarah, to send for Walter, whom Manon describes as "the little bastard running up and down the dining room, putting his greasy fingers in the serving plates, eating bits of meat from his father's hand like a dog" (5). The mention of Walter as a "bastard" reveals his status as a product of miscegenation, but also alludes to how Manon sees the child as a reckless monster.

To Manon, Walter is "a mad creature, like a beautiful and vicious little wildcat" whom she could easily picture "clawing the portieres" (5). The current descriptions of Walter serve as an example of how Manon relentlessly ascribes dehumanizing qualities to slaves in general, and Sarah's children in particular. Thus the novel shows how the mistress, like her husband, has internalized society's racist ideologies; she assumes the prerogative to use degrading terms about people of color, and to treat them as something other than human.

Sarah's other child, a girl named Nell, is described as "a dark, ugly thing" which "mew[s]…like a kitten" (6-7) when she is being nursed by her mother. According to Manon, her husband thinks Nell is "too dark to be his" (6), although the baby proves to be another result of his sexual transgressions. Walter, on the other hand, has inherited "his father's curly red hair and green eyes, his mother's golden skin, her full pouting lips" in addition to speaking "a strange gibberish even Sarah doesn't understand" (5-6). The physical features

with which Walter is described can be seen as "racial" markers. His "curly red hair and green eyes" resonate with the norm of whiteness, while his "golden skin" and "full pouting lips" relate to his mother's blackness and indicate difference. Walter embodies the physical markers of both parents, and as will be seen, they come to represent a source of anxiety for both Manon and Sarah. While the child's incomprehensible speech may be said to highlight how Walter is dehumanized by his mistress, it also proves to be an indication of a hearing defect.

Manon's reference to Walter's mother's "full pouting lips" can further be seen as an example of how physical markers of blackness are assigned racial stigma and transform into sexual markers. The description alludes to physical features of African American women, which are biologically determined and thus uncontrollable. However, as seen in *Kindred*'s portrayal of Dana and *Property's* portrayal of Sarah, these external characteristics may turn into stereotypical and stigmatizing images of black women. The current example indicates the kind of depictions frequently used in the novel as a means to highlight Sarah's "Otherness" and to portray her as a promiscuous woman. This narrative strategy demonstrates how Sarah – like the slave boys in the opening scene – becomes a target of pornotroping, when "full pouting lips" come to signify voluptuousness.

Manon's portrayal of Sarah thus resonates with the religious myth and hegemonic stereotype of the Jezebel, which alluded to a female "who animalistically and unhibitedly acted upon her sexual urges" (Mitchell 25). This image of the promiscuous, willing, as well as fertile Jezebel served to justify the sexual and reproductive exploitation of black women by white men. In the same way as white men attributed an inherently brutish nature to male slaves in order to maintain white male superiority, Anglo-American women needed a counter image as a means to sustain the ideology of a superior race. While antebellum society expected white women to be sexually pure, black women were perceived as sexually

available. These opposing images show how white men claimed the right to control and regulate the sexualities of all women, regardless of race, and the expectations in turn affected how white women and black women perceived themselves and each other.

Mitchell suggests that the stereotypical image of the Jezebel also "provid[ed] justification for White men's behavior in the eyes of their White wives, mothers, and sisters" (28). Manon, however, exploits the sexualized image of the slave woman primarily as a means to project her own powerlessness onto Sarah. Instead of acknowledging her own position of inferiority in a patriarchic society and the common ground on which the two women are both oppressed, she chooses to increase the suffering of the one person she can control. As Mitchell explains, white mistresses failed "to assign blame to the rightful party…because of their own lack of power" and thus "exerted what power they had over the victims directly" (117). Accordingly, as the novel demonstrates, the black woman is left utterly powerless; her master exploits her in terms of her sex, while her mistress degrades her on the basis of her skin color as well as her sex.

Barbara Johnson refers to the hegemony's "*in*difference to finding out that there *is* no difference" (178) between "white" and "black" – being socio-politically constructed binary oppositions. Johnson suggests that "[t]he resistance to finding out that the Other is the same springs out of the reluctance to admit that the same is Other" (178). The white woman and the black woman are both "Other" as women in relation to men, yet they are differentiated by the categorization of "whiteness" and "blackness." Since the black woman falls into both categories of "Otherness" – or difference – she is placed at the ultimate bottom of the social hierarchy. Thus the white woman may be reluctant to admit that the black woman is just like her, because to do so would be to eliminate her social privilege of belonging to the category of "whiteness." As the relationship between the white mistress and her black slave shows,

Manon's attempts to assert power over Sarah and portray her as "Other" demonstrates her unwillingness to acknowledge her own position within the system of "Otherness."

The novel frequently directs attention to the hierarchical relationship that it constructs of the white master, his mistress, and her black maid. A telling example is when Gaudet suspects Sarah of poisoning his coffee, whereby he reminds both his wife and Sarah about his authority and gives them a somewhat threatening warning: "You women should think about what would become of you if I wasn't here" (17). Manon's subsequent musings about this compelling quandary reveals how she refuses to be aligned with Sarah as in Gaudet's reference to "you women:" "Does Sarah think about what would become of her if he were gone? How could she not? What would become of me must be her next question, as she belongs to me" (17). Thus Manon's response to her husband's authoritative statement is to immediately create a power relation between her and her black maid, whereby she identifies Sarah as her property.

Johnson offers an illustration of a tetrapolar graph which shows the hierarchical relationship of the categories of male, female, white, and black. With reference to this image, she explains how "[t]he black woman is both invisible and ubiquitous: never seen in her own right but forever appropriated by the others for their own ends" (168). As the example above shows, Manon relies on Sarah's blackness to maintain some superiority of her own; by claiming her ownership over Sarah, she is no longer reduced to nothing. Johnson further points out that the graph of differences that she displays is "itself a fantasy of universality" (168), since it excludes the multitudes and differences *within* each category. As a means to underscore the exclusionary qualities of social categories, Johnson writes that:

> There is no point of view from which the universal characteristics of the human, or of the woman, or of the black woman…can be selected and totalized. Unification and simplification are fantasies of domination, not understanding. (170)

These "fantasies of domination" pervade the power relations manifested in the novel and influence the white mistress's portrayal of her black slave in particular. Manon does not regard Sarah as a woman in her own right, but rather identifies her in terms of her blackness which signifies ultimate inferiority and subservience. By reframing the experience of the enslaved black woman through the perspective of the white plantation mistress, Martin demonstrates and critiques how "presentation and representation of reality are subjective constructs" (Mitchell 12), which have the power to define another's reality as well as the "Other." As the novel demonstrates, Sarah becomes a victim of sexual objectification and exploitation; not only as a result of the master's violation of her body but also by the mistress who objectifies and stigmatizes her through narration.

The Conquering Gaze

Early in the novel Manon reminisces about her first encounter with Sarah who was initially given to her as a wedding gift from her aunt. Her aunt had thought Sarah to be a meticulous maid who would most likely satisfy Manon's "fastidious" husband: "And that was how Sarah came to this house, six weeks before I did, commissioned to ready it for my arrival" (20). That Sarah was a wedding gift from Manon's aunt underscores her status as chattel, as movable property, and not a person in her own right. Moreover, the emphasis on the master's needs demonstrates how Manon's property is after all her husband's. The reader learns that Manon had no dowry to speak of when she married her husband and, because she had nothing of her own to bring into the marriage, one may say that she, too, is reduced to property.

Manon underscores her husband's satisfaction with Sarah by pointing out that he "wrote [her] aunt himself to thank her for this 'prize'; his house had never been so well arranged" (20). The master's reference to his well arranged household denotes his contentment with Sarah as servant as well as her sexual availability as a slave, and the ironic emphasis on his use of the word "prize" indicates Manon's jealousy. The letter may be said to diminish Manon's worth in the eyes of her husband; not only as the mistress of her household, but also as the object of her husband's desire.

When Manon wonders how her aunt could have "dealt her happiness such a blow," the novel gives an example of how Sarah is perceived as promiscuous and is blamed for her master's transgressions: "Did she think that because I was young and pretty, I was proof against the temptations presented by Sarah?" (20). Manon's reference to "the temptations presented *by* Sarah" appears to insinuate that Sarah is the seducer instead of being the victim. However, the protagonist exposes her own misjudgment when she refers to her initial encounter with Sarah. Upon Manon's arrival to her new home, Sarah "wasn't looking at [her] at all. She was looking past [her], with an expression of sullen expectation, at [her] husband" (22). Manon's recollection of her first-impression of Sarah reveals how her black maid was a likely target of rape: "Her appearance was pleasing, tall, slender, light-skinned, neatly dressed, excellent posture" (22). As Joane Nagel points out with regard to the master's lust, "[w]hite men's sexual preference for light-skinned enslaved women was no secret to their wives" (107). Sarah's "expression of sullen expectation" thus indicates her powerlessness and fear of sexual abuse, which also serves as an example of how the reality of Sarah's experience as a slave is told through Manon's point of view.

Near the end of the novel Manon thinks back on the past when she "was too naïve to understand the nature of the bargain [she] was making" (163) with regard to marrying her husband. She recalls that her desire for him had been neutral, but that she was flattered by his

apparent infatuation with her: “I enjoyed how strongly he seemed to be attracted to me. His eyes were always moving over me…I could feel his struggle to refrain from pulling me to him” (163). Manon had concluded that her husband must have seen something valuable in her, “something more desirable than money” (163). She thus expresses her hope to be the object of Gaudet’s desire, but then admits how her “invincible stupidity was revealed to [her] on [her] wedding night,” when her “[m]other’s entire advice had been the word ‘submit’” (164), which also shows how her mother socialized her into submissiveness.

Manon’s memory of her husband as a “steam engine…roar[ing] over [her] like a locomotive” as if “his object was to pull [her] limbs from their joints” (164), associates sex with violence. As she recounts this brutal “assault” on her wedding night, Manon indicates her powerlessness with regard to her own body at the hands of her husband: “Was there to be no trace of feeling for my helplessness, no tenderness in my marital bed?” (164). Thus the novel demonstrates how Manon sees the marital bed as a site of male dominance and violence, but most significantly, it conjures the image of Sarah who has no means of escaping the commands of her rapist. Manon portrays Sarah as her husband’s concubine by way of accusing her of intentionally seducing him. She therefore ignores the fact that Sarah has become a victim of a series of rapes and has thus been chosen by Gaudet as his sexual object.

Manon’s experience of “helplessness” in her marital bed serves as an example of how she sees herself as victim of her husband’s ravishment, but remains blind to the reality of his exploitation of Sarah. Sarah’s powerlessness and suffering as a slave is thereby repressed by Manon’s insistent pleas for sympathy with regard to her own misfortune. Sarah’s status as chattel may be said to be enforced by the way in which Manon disregards and dismisses her feelings as if she were not a human being.

At the same time, Manon objectifies Sarah through the narrative, which is seen by how she constantly perceives her husband's looks at Sarah's body as if he were claiming it with his gaze; "As Sarah leaned across him, he gave her a perplexed inspection" (35). The way that Manon depicts her husband's supposedly furtive looks at Sarah exemplifies how her jealousy and anger influence her perceptions; she reads her husband's gaze as both lustful and controlling. In a conversation with her husband, Manon points out how "[h]is eyes swept over [her] figure in that rapacious way [she] find[s] so unsettling" (11), indicating her own experience of unease by her husband's seemingly conquering gaze – as if he were appropriating both women's sexualities and controlling their bodies by way of looking. Thus one may say that Manon also controls Sarah's body by way of her narrative perspective, projecting her own powerlessness, instead of acknowledging their common experience of objectification and humiliation under male authority. Accordingly, Manon rejects her own inferiority in society at large, and in relation to her husband especially, by exploiting Sarah's legal status as property as well as her perceived social status as promiscuous.

Manon's description of her husband's aggressive behavior demonstrates how Gaudet claims her body, and illuminates how she is only an object of sexual gratification and available as his wife. Her mother's advice further underscores how it is her marital duty to succumb to her husband's wants. Thus her feeling of helplessness denotes her powerlessness as a woman who is not only expected to submit to her husband's sexual demands but is also defenseless against his physical force. In her attempt to understand why her mother did not warn her about "what she would be submitting to," Manon concludes that her "Father would never have subjected another creature to such an assault" (164). This is only one example of how Manon fondly reminisces about her deceased father and refuses to believe that he could have been as raw as her husband. Manon's blinding admiration for her father highlights the novel's critique of patriarchic institutions and how easily any member of society becomes

influenced by their destructive forces. While her father may appear to have been a more sympathetic character than her husband, he was equally preoccupied with slaveholding and demonstrably believed in the inferiority and dehumanization of African Americans.

In an effort to overcome her helplessness, Manon had tried to gain some power over her husband by anticipating his pleasure and encouraging him to sex. However, the birth of Walter made her lose "what little desire [she] had for her husband" since she realized that he was only drawn to her bed out of fear for having "fathered the only son he would ever have" (60). Manon experiences a deep humiliation by her former willingness, and is ashamed of her own childlessness since her husband is not childless. She is "nearly blind with resentment" because of her husband's transgressions and she suffers through the ordeal of "[their] conjugal encounters by recourse to a steadily waning sense of duty" (60). As she is "too proud to beg for [her] freedom" (60), Manon never confronts her husband with his transgressions. Instead she lets her anger out on Sarah who is powerless against the brutality of the master and defenseless against the degradation of the mistress. Because Manon is too consumed with her own suffering, she is unable to reflect upon and see the interrelatedness between her own and Sarah's condition; her resentment does not allow her to see beyond her own misery.

As a result of her despair of being of any value to her husband, Manon had "found the means to make [her] husband quit [her] bed" by numbing herself with port and sleeping tincture at night: "I offered neither encouragement nor resistance; I was there and not there at the same time. This frustrated him beyond endurance" (60). In order to free herself from her conjugal "duty," Manon resorts to acts of passive resistance. Because she cannot confront her husband with words, she speaks through action, blocking her husband out by numbing her own senses and emotions. After "a few weeks of this campaign" Gaudet had "slapped [her] hard across the face" and told her "[he had] not much interest in making love to a corpse" (60-

61). "'If I am dead,'" Manon had answered her husband, "'it is because you have killed me'" (61).

The current scenario inevitably brings into question Sarah's condition as a slave and as a victim of her master's lewdness. Firstly, Sarah does not have the rights or means to resort to alcohol or remedies to make her experience at the hands of Gaudet less unbearable. Secondly, the debasement imposed on her by the institution of slavery, being reduced to chattel as well as an available sexual object, can doubtlessly be considered a murder of the soul. Gaudet's comment about his lack of interest "in making love to a corpse" thus becomes somewhat hypocritical with regard to his perception and treatment of Sarah as an object, in addition to Sarah's presumed passive resistance when she assumes the place of her mistress in Gaudet's bed. Sarah doubtlessly feels that she has been "killed" by Gaudet too, albeit for reasons unacknowledged by her mistress.

Provoked by her husband's insinuations about her being "unbalanced," Manon had confronted her husband and proclaimed her refusal to be the mere object of his lust as much as his physical abuse: "I don't care what you do…I don't care what you think. I just want you to leave me alone" (61). Her expression of indifference to what her husband does as long as he "leaves [her] alone" once again reveals her preoccupation with her own suffering and lack of empathy in relation to Sarah. She exonerates herself from her conjugal "duty" by confronting her husband, yet she does not say a word on Sarah's behalf. Because Manon makes herself unavailable to her husband, he seeks satisfaction with Sarah who is available by status. Accordingly, Sarah's position as a slave also implies her being his "sex slave." That Gaudet exploits his wife's sole property to satisfy his sexual needs serves to emphasize Manon's sense of worthlessness in the eyes of her husband.

Paternalisation and the Abrogation of African American Lineage

The novel demonstrates how white male slaveholders disrupted the African American family by controlling their slaves' sexuality and desires. It also illuminates how African Americans' status as chattel to be bought and sold made it impossible to create and maintain normal family life. Because they were regarded and treated as property by the laws and norms of antebellum society they could not sustain their former cultural traditions. Through Manon's perspective, Martin shows how the perception and treatment of slaves as something other than humans justified the abrogation of African American lineages. This repudiation of African Americans' right to lineage is highlighted by the way in which slaves were always addressed by their first names, by their enslavers as well as within the slave community. Moreover, the slaves often assumed the family name of their master, which merely denoted their belonging to their master's property.

The novel offers an illustrative example of how slaves' familial bonds were discarded by their enslavers as a means to emphasize the slaves' status as property. Manon recalls what her father believed to be necessary in order to have "peace and harmony" on his plantation: "…the negroes must recognize that the farm is their provider and protector, that it gives them every good thing…friends and family, that it is the place they come from and where they will be valued and cared for until they die" (23-24). The reference to the plantation as the slaves' "provider and protector" and "the place they come from" evokes the image of a father figure at the head of a family. Paternalization served slaveholders to glorify the "peculiar institution" as a means to conceal the harsh reality of chattel slavery.

The current example demonstrates an attempt to disguise how slaves were neither regarded as part of the master's family, nor perceived as human beings; they were merely valued as property. To enslaved African Americans, the master's family name may thus be

said to symbolize a rejection of their rights and means to kinship. The novel highlights the idea of the family name as a symbol of property status or social freedom by portraying free African Americans who, unlike the slaves, are referred to by their last names. In the current chapter I have chosen to emphasize the equality between the white woman and the black woman by referring to both by their respective first names; I attempt to reveal how the hierarchical relationship between them is presented as socially and culturally conditioned and how this is manifested at the level of the narrative.

Cheryl I. Harris explains how the institutionalization of slavery was premised on the interaction between conceptions of race and property:

> The hyper-exploitation of Black labor was accomplished by treating Black people themselves as objects of property. Race and property were thus conflated by establishing a form of property contingent on race – only Blacks were subjugated as slaves and treated as property. (1716)

Harris further points out that "[t]he law relied on bounded, objective, and scientific definitions of race" and that "[b]y making race determinant and the product of rationality and science, dominant and subordinate positions within the racial hierarchy were disguised as the product of natural law and biology rather than as naked preferences" (1738). Accordingly, the idea of race was constructed on the basis of "natural law and biology" so as to justify a system of dominance based on white superiority. Whiteness became the norm and a status of privilege, while blackness became the difference and a status of inferiority. Consequently, "whiteness" also assumed the authority to equate "blackness" with property.

Similarly, theories of biological determinism justified the construction of hierarchical gender roles which placed white men in a position of authority over white women. Biological sex was thought to determine one's gender – and social identity; masculinity was associated

with strength and authority, while femininity alluded to passivity and submissiveness. Judith Butler, however, promotes the idea that gender is historically situated and variable; "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (274). Thus Butler suggests that gender is performative and that the gendered body is not "a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic" (274). Because Martin's novel of slavery is focalized through the perspective of the white woman, it brings to the fore how sexism and racism are interrelated concepts that spring out of the same hegemonic ideologies. The novel's title also indicates how the institutions of marriage and family are implicated by the norms and laws of chattel slavery; the hegemonic family structure reflects the hierarchical structure of society at large. Moreover, as seen in the novel, slavery exists *within* the family as a result of miscegenation, which further demonstrates how the family becomes a site of property relations. Because Walter follows the condition of his mother he becomes the master's property and has no right to patrimony.

Manon questions her own place in society by complaining about the constraining and corruptive forces of patriarchy: "There is no escape, yet how can I resign myself, when the world that is denied me tantalizes me at every turn" (96). She describes this inescapable condition – or system – as "lies without end:" "We lived on them, all of us, all the time" (52). Thus she critiques how society oppresses her as woman, although she is unable to see through the "lies" pertaining to chattel slavery and the double oppression experienced by her black maid.

Manon points out how she "sometimes think[s] Sarah blames [her] for her fate" but claims that Sarah "sealed it herself shortly after [Manon] arrived by getting pregnant" (25). The father of Sarah's child was Bam, a fellow slave and Gaudet's butler. Manon explains how she was not surprised by their hopes to marry since she had recognized how Bam "could not

keep his eyes off her [Sarah] when Sarah passed through the room" (25). The way in which Manon highlights Bam's seemingly lustful looks at Sarah is another example of how Sarah is objectified through the narrative. Thus Manon not only constructs Sarah as an object of sexual lust through her husband's gaze, but also through the gaze of a male slave whom Sarah had desired to marry.

Manon explains how she "saw nothing against" a marriage between the two: "It seemed an advantageous match to me, as it would serve to strengthen their loyalty to the property" (25). Manon's reference to the marriage as "an advantageous match to [her]" may also imply hopes to keep her husband away from Sarah. She further adds that "[t]hese marriages the negroes make are not legal, but they set great store by them" (25). The novel thus illuminates how slaves may have been allowed to marry because family life could benefit the enslavers by increasing property. Furthermore, the novel may be said to imply the contrast between the familiar bonds made by enslaved African Americans and those "arranged" – legally – by Anglo-Americans. Manon states that the slaves "set great store" by their marriages, while her own marriage testifies to the opposite, seen by its lack of mutual respect and affection. As Catherine Clinton observes, "[w]ithin the complex sexual scenario of plantation society, power eclipsed other themes…Slaveowners incorporated violence, actual or implied, into their patterns of sexual satisfaction" (222). Gaudet's coercive measures are a source of great anxiety to Manon, and her husband's physical and psychological abuse ultimately destroys any notion of intimacy between them.

Since Manon had initially approved of a marriage between Sarah and Bam, she informed her husband about the matter herself because Sarah was afraid he would object to the match. Sarah's concern turned out to be justified, judging by Gaudet's reaction: He had "commenced slapping and hitting her until she was flat on the floor, begging him to stop" (25). Manon recalls having been pushed out of her husband's office after her attempt to speak

a word on Sarah's behalf, whereby she reveals her awareness about Sarah's helplessness: "…while I was standing there, listening to Sarah's pleas and his curses, I understood everything. Sarah had resisted him all those weeks when I wasn't there, and now she had tried to outmaneuver him, but she never would again" (25). Manon thus highlights how her husband, like Sutter, controls his slaves' desires as a means to ensure the availability of the woman he wants for himself. Most importantly, however, Gaudet is portrayed as the perpetrator and Sarah as the victim, thus revealing Manon's awareness of Sarah's innocence which she deliberately chooses to ignore.

On the one hand, Manon knows about the common occurrence of miscegenation within the institution of slavery and may therefore consider it useless to confront her husband. On the other hand, she attempts to eschew her own powerlessness as woman and exploits her sense of racial superiority over Sarah. Before she recounts her husband's physical assault on Sarah, Manon retrospectively expresses her regret for having conveyed this seemingly harmless news to her husband. Because the novel has previously made clear how Manon blames Sarah for her husband's transgressions, her expression of regret reveals her selfishness and lack of empathy for the victim. Instead of regretting to have implicitly contributed to Sarah's fate at the hands of her lustful and punitive husband, Manon is primarily concerned with how her actions affected her own worth within the household.

Manon recounts how Bam was severely beaten and then sold, for which her husband was "pleased with himself" despite having been "forced to sell a valuable negro at a loss" (26). Moreover, "Sarah's baby, a boy, was taken from her as soon as it was born" and was "sent out to nurse" (26) at Gaudet's brother's plantation where he would eventually be sold when he was old enough. When Sarah had asked for permission to marry Bam, she had "still talked and behaved like a normal servant, asking for permission, eager to please" (25). Manon's reference to Sarah's eagerness to please may suggest how Sarah cherished the hope

that she might have a chance to establish a family of her own, which would also reduce her vulnerability to rape by the master. However, after Gaudet had shattered her dreams by selling Bam as well as displacing her new-born child, Sarah had "wept, pleaded, then grew silent and secretive" (26).

Sarah's reaction demonstrates the brutality of slavery and the unintelligible feeling of devastation by losing her own child. Moreover, her silence denotes her sense of powerlessness as a slave and the property of her master. After recounting her husband's horrifying demonstration of ownership over Sarah, Manon nonchalantly adds that "[b]y the end of that year, Sarah was pregnant with Walter" (26). Thus the novel underscores how Gaudet exploits and asserts his ownership over Sarah's body, not only as a slave but also as an available target of rape. In this regard, the novel also shows how "[t]he right claimed by slave owners and their agents over the bodies of female slaves was a direct expression of their presumed property rights over Black people as a whole" (Davis qtd. in Mitchell 25).

"What Sort of Women Doesn't Want Children?" – The Shame of Childlessness and the Unwanted Child

Because her husband has a child with Sarah, Manon is ashamed of her own childlessness. Moreover, her mother's way of "prying into the state of [her] marriage" with her "constant insinuations about [her] failure to conceive a child" reinforces Manon's sense of failure to fulfill marital expectations. Manon explains how she initially "felt a mild curiosity about [her childlessness] herself" since "it wasn't for a lack of trying" (38). While Manon and her mother had "cherished the hope that the fault was with [her] husband," Walter's birth had proved otherwise. The novel shows how Manon refers to the birth of Walter as the primary reason for not having any children of her own: "In a way, Walter *is* the reason, but I could

speak to no one about it" (38). Thus the reader is lead to believe that her childlessness is a result of her hatred towards her husband and not of a physical barrenness. That she "could speak to no one about it" also suggests the prevailing secrecy around the issue of miscegenation between white slaveholders and their female slaves; everyone knows about its common occurrence, yet the corruptive powers of patriarchy force them to keep silent.

Clinton points out that "planter-slave liaisons were tolerated in private" but that "white men were required in their public lives to obey the plantation culture's rigid dictates concerning race and sex" (214). Thus "[s]candal, which shone light on these contradictions, was perhaps worse than the deed itself" (Clinton 214). When the Gaudets receive a visit from their friend, Joel Borden, Walter, who was meant to stay outside with the other slaves, suddenly comes storming into the parlor, and his "marked resemblance" to his father immediately reveals Gaudet's transgressions to the guest (30). Manon explains how she "believ[ed] [Borden's] mouth dropped open," and that "[her] husband understood that Joel understood, which infuriated him" (30). While Sarah hurriedly grabs Walter to get him out of the room, Gaudet follows them, "directing slaps at one and the other," and then slams the door behind them (30-31). The incident thus exemplifies the kind of "scandal" that exposes the contradictions inherent in the issue of miscegenation, and illuminates how the exposal is "worse than the deed itself."

Although Manon expresses hatred towards her husband, she desires his recognition and wants to be valued as a person. Since Walter is a living proof of Gaudet's lechery, the child also becomes a victim of the mistress's fury. As Mitchell observes, "[i]f enslaving husbands were sexually active with enslaved Black women, their wives were likely to abuse not only the enslaved woman but also their husband's children by the enslaved women" (117). Like his mother, Walter becomes a target of his mistress's dehumanization and objectification. Manon also shuns Walter's presence whenever possible, which implies that

she has no interest in nurturing him, or any other slave child belonging to the plantation. The way in which Manon is haunted by Walter's physical resemblance to his parents implies that he is a constant reminder of her childlessness and sense of worthlessness. The boy thus augments the mistress's jealousy and resentment of Sarah who is both the proof of where her husband's inclinations lie as well as the mother of his child.

Manon recalls how she "[i]n the fifth year of [her] marriage" was forced by her mother and her husband to see a doctor about her probable inability to conceive a child (38). When the doctor could "see no physical reason" he had inquired if she in fact wanted children. Manon is perplexed by the doctor's inquiry about the subject of her own will in relation to motherhood: "I gave this question thought. I had assumed I would have children, the question of whether I wanted them had never occurred to me. What sort of woman doesn't want children?" (40). Venetria K. Patton points out that white middle-class women of the nineteenth century "were expected to 'mother' the society by providing moral values and nurturance" (30). In accordance with the "separate spheres" ideology women were positioned in the private sphere where their role as mothers gained significance to society at large since "mothers were responsible for raising the young men, who would in turn become the future rulers of society" (Patton 31). As a result, the cult of true womanhood and the "separate spheres" ideology developed into a cult of motherhood. "Thus the ideals of motherhood and womanhood were often collapsed into one set of ideals that implied women and mothers were one and the same" (Patton 31). Manon's reaction to the question of whether she wanted children demonstrates how motherhood was seen as a societal and marital duty, an inseparable aspect of womanhood, and therefore not a subject of choice.

When Manon asks herself "what sort of woman doesn't want children" the novel evokes the image of Sarah and the profound complexity of motherhood for enslaved African American women. Thus Manon underscores her own blindness to the reality of Sarah's

condition as a slave and a mother. Not only are Sarah's children the result of rape, they are also born slaves since they inevitably follow the condition of the mother. Consequently, Sarah has no control over their future since their lives are in the hands of their master. As Mitchell observes; "[d]enied the right to own herself or her offspring, the enslaved mother had little or no control in choosing her sexual partner, in utilizing methods of contraception, and in the fates of her children" (25-26). Gaudet's power over Sarah and her children is especially apparent in the narrator's reference to the incident with Bam and Sarah's first-born child. The child was a product of love and, most importantly, the father was not the master. Thus the boy may also be said to have been a symbol of hope. However, that Gaudet brutally took the child from Sarah's arms, and one year later fathered her second child, Walter, shows how slavery ensured to erase all hope and freedom of desire.

Seen in this perspective, the birth of Walter may be seen as representing Sarah's loss of hope. Walter not only reminds her of her lost child, he also becomes a symbol of the loss of herself – her body and soul. Walter's presence is therefore a constant reminder of the threat of sexual violence. Manon's inability to acknowledge Sarah's powerlessness with regard to her status as chattel is evident in her perception of Sarah as a mother. Patton explains how the "consolidation of women and mothers is what made the removal of maternal rights from female slaves a means of degendering" (31). To female slaves, motherhood was neither a subject of choice nor a subject of natural mothering. As Patton states; "[b]irth within an enslaved community may not be read as the reproduction of mothering because the female slave is denied parental rights" (12). Recognition of kinship would undermine property relations, which is why the enslaved offspring could not belong to a mother or a father. As noted earlier, the enslaved female's body was reduced to mere "flesh," and "[i]f one reads 'flesh' as 'sex' and 'body' as 'gender,' then the slave trade turned bodies into degendered but

still sexed 'flesh'" (Patton 10). Thus, "[f]emale slaves were not recognized as women and mothers; they were merely sexed property" (Patton 12).

At the doctor's office, Manon had noticed "a large wrought-iron cage…in which two canaries hopped about" and how "[d]uring [their] conversation, one of these birds sang plaintively" (38-39). The image of the two birds inside the cage may be seen as a symbol of Sarah's actual enslavement and Manon's experience of "enslavement" within her marriage. Manon's tendency to portray herself as a primary victim suggests how the bird who "sang plaintively" represents herself – her own experience of suffocation and agony. Manon had also recognized outside the window "a plantain tree…with a big bruised purple pod of unripe fruit hanging from it" (40). The sight had made her think of "[her] husband's embraces, so urgent and disagreeable, his kneading and sucking at [her] breasts until the nipples hurt…" (40).

The image of "unripe…bruised fruit" may be said to symbolize Manon's childlessness; while her youth suggests reproductive possibilities, she sees herself as "bruised" by her husband and his aggressive "embraces." However, her experience of being "bruised" may refer less to the physical sense of the word than to the psychological scars inflicted by her husband's assertions of dominance over her body. Nevertheless, the symbolism of unripe, bruised fruit that Manon may be said to identify herself with doubtlessly alludes to the female slave whose body is severely violated by the various forces of slavery.

Referring to the legacy of slavery, Saidija V. Hartman points out how "…the body broken by the regime of work, the regularity of punishment, the persistence of torture, and the violence of rape and sexual exploitation is in dire need of restitution" (77). With regard to the violation of the female body as represented in the novel, "the violence of rape" is perhaps the most telling difference between Sarah and her mistress. Under the subtitle "The Trials of

Girlhood" in Jacobs' *Incidents,* Linda Brent readily testifies to the all too often brutal repudiation of slave girls' innocence: "She will become prematurely knowing in evil things…She will be compelled to realize that she is no longer a child" (26). Brent's testimony of a slave girl's harsh reality in relation to her vulnerability to rape demonstrates how Sarah's youth and innocence have been taken from her by Gaudet's ravishments. Moreover, Manon's references to her husband's "urgent embraces" evoke images of Gaudet's ruthlessness when satisfying his needs with Sarah – being his sex slave.

The novel readily provides evidence of how white mistresses' sexuality, like the sexuality of female slaves, was restricted and regulated by the norms and laws of the patriarchal, antebellum society. In this regard, Spillers postulates how:

> …African-American women's community and Anglo-American women's community, under certain shared cultural conditions, were the twin actants on a common physical landscape…Neither could claim her body and its various productions – for quite different reasons, albeit – as her own. (77)

Although "[n]either could claim her body…as her own," there are those remarkable differences which African American feminist discourse has long sought to illuminate, and which Martin's novel with its alternative approach readily shows. Thus Spillers continues by saying that:

> …just as we duly regard similarities between life conditions of American women – captive and free – we must observe those undeniable contrasts and differences so decisive that the African-American female's historic claim to the territory of womanhood and 'femininity' still tends to rest too solidly on the subtle and shifting calibrations of a liberal ideology. (77)

In light of Spiller's impelling argument not to neglect "those undeniable contrasts" between the histories and sexualities of white mistresses and black women, the primary and most crucial difference is how enslaved women were exploited as sexual property. They were regarded as subhuman and thus placed outside of the realm of "femininity" or "womanhood," yet their female sex – which was thought to determine one's gender identity – was appropriated for its reproductive abilities as well as to satisfy white male lasciviousness. As Mitchell states, "[t]he license to rape emanated from and facilitated the ruthless economic domination that was the gruesome hallmark of slavery" (25). Nevertheless, Martin's portrayal of the relationship between the white mistress and her female slave demonstrates Spiller's contention that "…we cannot unravel one female's narrative from the other's, cannot decipher one without tripping over the other" (Spillers 77). Through its focus on the familial sphere of an antebellum household, the novel shows how patriarchic norms regulate the lives and identities of women – white and black – through coercion – by means of social conditioning as well as threats of violence. While Manon questions the corruptive forces of society at large, she is unable to see the truth that connects her own and Sarah's suffering.

Manon's answer to the doctor's question of whether she wanted children confirms how she blames her husband and his transgressions in particular for her childlessness. Her response had been a plain no, followed by a blunt explanation: "It is because I despise my husband" (41). When the doctor had inquired how her husband had earned her enmity, Manon had explained that her husband had borne her servant a son and that "this creature [was] allowed to run loose in the house like a wild animal" (41). This, according to Manon, should be "sufficient cause for a wife to despise her husband" (41). When the doctor had indifferently replied that it could not be unknown to her that "there [were] many such cases," Manon underlines that this was "precisely [her] grievance," the fact "[t]hat it [was] common" (41). Thus the novel underscores its critique of patriarchy and the way in which sexual

relations between white men and their female slaves are "accepted" by society as an inevitability, despite the laws of slavery which prohibit miscegenation. That society implicitly allows the sexual exploitation of female slaves by means of repression demonstrates the dangerous implications of a socio-political system based on male dominance.

The paradox inherent in the prohibition of miscegenation and simultaneous acceptance of concubinage is especially evident when seen in relation to society's expectations of white women. As Nagel points out, "…women had neither the property and political rights, nor the freedom of movement enjoyed by white men," because the ideal of femininity "emphasized innate sexual purity as a means of controlling male excess and stressed women's domestic and maternal roles" (57). "Women who did not achieve the ideal of purity were considered to have 'fallen' into a lower class" (Nagel 57).

Fantasies of Domination and the Dependency on the "Other"

Manon's doctor had inquired why she did not simply sell Sarah to eliminate her distress and her reason for not wanting to have children, whereby Manon's answer offers yet another exposal of her knowledge about Sarah's suffering and blamelessness in relation to Gaudet: "No. He would only find another. And this one suits me. She hates him as much as I do" (41). Thus the novel directs attention to the two women's shared experience of oppression under the patriarchic authority which is represented by Gaudet. In claiming Sarah's hatred of her husband, Manon contradicts her accusations of Sarah as the agent of her own fate. The comment also indicates the mistress's dependency on her female slave, as well as the agenda behind her seemingly vengeful scheme; Manon to some extent identifies herself with her black maid, but exploits Sarah's status as her property to alleviate her own anxiety caused by her husband's authority.

Sarah "suits" her because she, too, suffers at the hands of her husband, and Manon is comforted by the knowledge that she is not the only victim. Susan V. Donaldson proposes Sarah to be "…something very like a double, a mirror of Manon's own anger and victimization" (274). The idea of Sarah as Manon's "mirror" is implicitly underscored by Manon in the novel: "As she leaned across me to place the brimming cup in the only space clear of bottles or pins, *her reflection obscured my own*" (53, emphasis mine). Here, the novel may be said to highlight how the women's experiences reflect each other, albeit what Manon sees is first and foremost the object of her husband's misplaced lust. That Sarah is more a reminder of Gaudet's transgressions than a "mirror" in which Manon sees herself, is underlined when Sarah's reflection makes her think of the previous night when she spotted Sarah "rush[ing] from [her] husband's bedroom" (54). The memory causes "[a] flood of anger" and anxiety, whereby Manon manages to knock Sarah's arm so that coffee is spilled "across the dresser" (54). Manon then blames Sarah for her clumsiness and, while looking through her bedroom window at the dark sky "the color of lead," as if mirroring her own sense of gloominess, she reclaims how "[she] can't stand much more" (54). Although Manon is aware of her husband's power over Sarah, her own hatred and insecurity stand in the way for any possible interpersonal communication or bond of "sisterhood."

Manon sees in Sarah "not just the limits of her own authority and mastery but strategies for rebelling against the mastery of her husband" (Donaldson 274). An example is when Manon is annoyed by her husband's idle talk, and looks at him "blankly, without comment, as if he was speaking a foreign language" (8). "This unnerves him," she says, and admits that "[i]t's a trick [she] learned from Sarah" (8). In her article, Donaldson refers to political scientist James C. Scott and his use of the phrase "hidden transcript" (275). "The 'hidden transcript,'" according to Scott, "'is the underside of the 'public transcript' wielded by the dominant over the subordinate…to stage encounters between the powerful and the

powerless'" (Donaldson 275). While public transcripts "plot out the 'open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate,'" "'[e]very subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant'" (Scott qtd. in Donaldson 275). "'Such critiques," Donaldson points out, "are expressed openly, albeit in disguised form…as vehicles for insinuating insubordination'" (Scott qtd. in Donaldson 275).

As mentioned earlier, Manon imitates her husband's power mechanisms as a means to create a distance from Sarah and imagine her own superiority. In light of Donaldson's observations this may also be seen as a kind of "hidden transcript" with which Manon "insinuat[es] insubordination" and simultaneously critiques her husband's power. In the current example from the novel Manon does not emulate her husband's strategies of dominance, but imitates Sarah's ways of criticizing both her master's and her mistress's modes of degradation. As Donaldson states:

> Sarah's hidden transcript, a reading of *Property* suggests, reveals itself in the blank looks the slave directs at both master and mistress, in the mask of stupidity to which she periodically resorts, in her postures of veiled indignation, and possibly in her adroit manipulation of her sexuality. (275)

With regard to the powerless' critique of the powerful, Donaldson proposes that "[t]he dominant…'develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed'" (Scott qtd. in Donaldson 275). Gaudet's reaction to Manon's blank look shows how he demonstrates his own authority by underscoring his wife's subordination: "'Since there are no servants presently available, Mistress Manon…I'll have to prevail on you to serve me some meat'" (8). As the current example shows, the hierarchical structure of power relations that the novel creates readily reveals how fantasies of

insubordination and domination manifest themselves in an endless, vicious cycle. However, the black woman remains at the bottom, ultimately powerless by the double burden of being both "black" and "woman."

When Manon had told the doctor that she wanted to keep Sarah merely because Sarah despises her husband as much as herself, the novel gives a clarifying picture of how the mistress ignores her black maid's position within the power hierarchy of her household. Manon explains how "[she] saw a flicker of sympathy cross [the doctor's] expression, but [she] didn't think it was for [her]. He was feeling pity for [her] husband, trapped between two furies" (41). Manon unquestionably sees herself as the person to be pitied, although there is ample evidence to allege that Sarah is "trapped between two furies." Unlike Manon, however, Sarah acknowledges that she and her mistress share a common enemy, Gaudet and the patriarchal social system that he represents, and that he is responsible for both women's unhappiness. After Borden had left the night that Gaudet was revealed as Walter's father, Manon threw "[herself] across the bed and wept" and cried herself into sleep (32). "When [she] woke, Sarah was there nursing her baby, her eyes closed, a dreamy expression on her face" (32). Sarah's "dreamy expression" may be said to denote that she, like her mistress, prays that she will one day be freed from Gaudet and his perverse and coercive ways.

Having seen her mistress's tears of despair, Sarah presumably includes her in her prayers, aware that the two are victims of the same, patriarchic system that denies them the freedom that they long for. However, when there might be a slight hope of reconciliation between the white mistress and her black slave, the novel proves how Manon still lets her jealousy and rage cloud her judgment of Sarah: "Did you send Walter in to get even with me or with him?" (32). Manon's accusation demonstrates how she still feels threatened by Sarah and sees her as a rival rather than as a co-sufferer. Her highly inappropriate question causes Sarah to snap her eyes open, as if her reverie was abruptly replaced by the hopeless reality of

her situation. Sarah's condition thus echoes Jacob's narrative of Linda Brent whose mistress "pitied herself as a martyr; but…was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed" (30).

That Manon perceives Sarah as a threat is evident by how she perceives Sarah watching her at night when they are locked up in the same room by Gaudet in order to keep them safe from a possible slave revolt. Thus the novel portrays an ironic reversal of roles when seen in contrast to Jacobs' narrative of Linda Brent who feared for her life when she found out that her jealous mistress "spent many a sleepless night to watch over [her]" (31). Brent confides to the reader how her life "had been often threatened; and you can imagine, better than I can describe, what an unpleasant sensation it must produce to wake up in the dead of night and find a jealous woman bending over you" (31). As Martin's novel shows, Manon ignores Sarah's innocence, although she knows that her maid is not the one to blame for her husband's transgressions. The novel also reveals that Manon is aware of her own furious temper and how it affects Sarah's perception of her. When Manon's mother has died of the cholera epidemic, leaving her property to her daughter, Manon wonders what she will do about Peek, her mother's former servant. She concludes that unless her mother had arranged for something else, Peek was now hers, and then muses that "Sarah was doubtless telling [Peek] how hard her life will be when she comes to the country" (84).

Given that Manon portrays her and Sarah as sworn enemies, she is most likely referring to herself as the reason for Sarah's "hard life" in the country, thinking that Sarah is warning Peek about her harsh mistress. The novel highlights how Manon is aware of her behavior towards Sarah but is nevertheless unwilling to change her attitude and make Sarah's life less unbearable. By imagining herself as the person who is making Sarah's life "hard," Manon also reveals how she ignores the predominant source of Sarah's misery.

Manon's image of her and Sarah as rivals is readily demonstrated in a particular scene which echoes the novel's opening scenario. Through the spyglass, Manon is witnessing yet another game which proves her husband's inclinations to violence for pleasure. According to Manon, however, "[t]his afternoon's game was a more straightforward one, not very original at all" (18). What she refers to as a "straightforward" game includes a couple of strong boys who are required to fight until one of them is unable to get up. "The loser then receive[s] a whipping" (18). Manon describes it as "an eerie scene to watch through the glass because there was no sound," and admits that she gazed "for several minutes" (18-19). The scene may be said to reveal how Manon has become somewhat desensitized towards the violence inflicted upon the slaves' bodies. Her use of the word "eerie" also indicates how her vision is both frightening and intriguing, which may suggest how the fight evokes an uncanny sensation. To Manon, the violence is familiar, but without the sound it "all looked as serene and orchestrated as a dance" (19), thus becoming unfamiliar.

Manon takes a particular interest in the boy who "was clearly the better fighter, though the smaller of the two," and urges Sarah to join her, based on the premise that she "might see something [she] need[s] to know" (19). Because Sarah can relate too well to the brutality outside the window, she backs away "as if [her mistress] [had] asked her to pick up a roach" (19). The current scene might be read as an example of Manon's fantasies of domination over Sarah. Her advising Sarah to look through the window may be said to imply that Manon imagines a physical confrontation with her black maid – the boys becoming an allusion of the two female "rivals." In this vision, Manon is presumably imagining herself as the smaller, albeit stronger boy – the "underdog" – and Sarah as the "taller," yet weaker boy who ultimately ends up "facedown in the dirt" (19). Manon may thus be said to demonstrate, in her own mind, how her superiority in terms of "race" as well as class makes up for her small size, leaving Sarah on the bottom rung – "facedown in the dirt." Manon's inference that Sarah

"might see something [she] needs to know" can therefore be read as a threat, as though Manon warns Sarah to stay away from her husband.

However, when Manon perceives the victor of the fight "look[ing] up boldly at the house" as if he were staring directly at her, she reacts by "back[ing] away from the window, stunned, momentarily as guilty as a child caught stealing candy" (19). While Sarah has gone to her mistress's room, having heard her baby whining, Manon is left to wonder about her sudden sense of shame: "Why should I feel guilty? [she] thought" (20). Manon's feeling of guilt can be seen as another exposal of her knowledge that Sarah is in fact innocent, and therefore not the real threat, which is her husband. That Sarah leaves to nurse her baby, Nell – the most recent result of Gaudet's ravishments – significantly highlights *why* Manon should feel as she does. Nevertheless, Manon's inability to answer her own question demonstrates how her knowledge about Sarah's faultlessness is repressed by her own rage and suffering.

The scene in question offers yet another example of how Manon portrays herself as victim, while simultaneously attempting to demonstrate insubordination to Sarah. Donaldson suggests that "Manon "emulate[s] [her husband's] staged performances of mastery and brutality – as though to underscore her distance from Sarah, whose plight, after all, is all too close to her own sense of suffocation and violation at the hands of her husband" (274). Manon's tendency to imitate her husband's authority in order to create a power relation between her and Sarah becomes increasingly evident as the novel progresses. The longer Manon is confined within her household – in "what seems to [her] the very vestibule of hell" (84), the more her anxiety and experience of suffocation grows.

Ideals of Motherhood and the Culmination of Exploitation

Unquestionably the most notable and absurdly revealing representation of Manon's fantasies of domination is to be found in the second section of the novel, when Manon takes Sarah to her childhood home in New Orleans where her mother lies on her deathbed. During her last hour, Manon's mother takes a long, hard look at her daughter's maid and subsequently queries why her daughter has brought "*that* one" along with her (73). The mother's use of a demonstrative pronoun illustrates bjectification by way of language, which makes the differences between "her own kind" and "Other." As if to underscore her mother's racist attitude, Manon too objectifies Sarah by referring to her as property: "'Why shouldn't I? She's *mine*'" (73; emphasis mine). These modes of reference demonstrate a move from physical to verbal objectification, highlighting the black woman as a target of imposed meanings and uses.

Upon hearing Sarah's baby crying in the background, Manon's mother starts questioning her daughter about the baby's father. Unwilling to give her mother a proper reply, ashamed to expose the truth, her mother provides it herself, blaming her daughter for Gaudet's transgressions: "'I thought you would manage better than you have, Manon…You neglect your duties and so you have no control in your own house" (74). Stressing her daughter's "duties" as a wife and mistress suggests the cult of "true womanhood" and an attempt to socialize Manon. As though to underscore the importance of this plight, Manon's mother's haunting words of disappointment become her very last. Right when Manon is thinking that "[she] could not bear another lecture on [her] failings as a wife," she witnesses the horrifying sight of her mother dying: "…from [her mother's] mouth, nose, eyes, and ears, a black fluid gushed forth" (74).

Donaldson suggests that the image of "black fluid" alludes to the mother's "restaging her own long-standing repudiation of her interdependence with the slaves she owned and the bonds of her whiteness with their blackness" (279). Walter, who may be said to symbolize this immersion of "whiteness" and "blackness," represents both a link and a gap between the white mistress and her black maid. Because of her jealousy and racial bias Manon fails to see the "sameness" that connects her own suffering with Sarah's. When Manon drops to the floor by the terrifying sight of her mother while Sarah is "picking up the broken china," their eyes meet and Manon observes that "[they] were level there on the floor" (75). However, while Sarah is "biting her lower lip," as if mirroring her mistress's fright and expressing empathy, Manon perceives her "with about as much sympathy as a lizard" (75). Manon's portrayal of Sarah lacking in human compassion presents a threat which in reality mirrors her own self.

Her mother's death and a subsequent letter of condolences from her husband which she sees as a sheer sign of falsity leave Manon in a state of distress. Watching Sarah nursing her baby, she wonders why her husband agreed to let Sarah keep it and concludes that "[i]t was for [her husband's] own pleasure" (80). and as though this thought affects the absolute lengths of Manon's coldness, she assumes the place of Sarah's baby and starts sucking the milk from her maid's breasts. This absurd scenario may be said to be reminiscent of Spillers' reference to a scene in Jacobs' slave narrative where "[t]he 'jealous mistress'…forms an analogy with the 'master' to the extent that male dominative modes give the male the material means to fully act out what the female might only *wish*" (77). Manon "act[s] out" her fantasies of domination by imitating her husband's "male dominative modes," giving herself "the material means" to claim and exploit Sarah's body. The specificity of this exploitation may suggest how Manon's recent loss of her own mother and her hatred towards her depraved husband culminate into a dire need for both nurturance and revenge.

The scene thus also evokes the image of Sarah as a Mammy figure – the stereotype that alludes to slave women who often nursed their white mistress's children. According to Patton, "Mammy appears to meet the qualifications of true womanhood: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness," yet "she is still not a true woman" because "[m]othering was viewed as 'natural'" and "Mammy does not mother her 'natural' children, but her master's" (Patton 33). Manon's perverse exploitation of Sarah as a Mammy-figure serves to underscore how Sarah's gender identity is placed outside the realm of "true womanhood." As if to highlight how Manon herself fails to meet the expectations of this ideal, the novel replaces the child with the mistress herself. This reversal is not only rendered significant by the recent death of Manon's mother, but may also be said to demonstrate Manon's jealousy of Sarah's motherhood.

Assuming the place of Sarah's baby, Manon literally and symbolically disrupts the important bond between mother and child during breastfeeding. She also steals the one thing that Sarah has to give her baby – her milk. Thus the scene is tellingly reminiscent of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the slave mother Sethe whose milk is violently taken from her by a group of boys. Patton observes that within the novel "breast-feeding figures as the primary means by which Sethe defines herself as a mother and a woman" (35). Manon's exploitation of Sarah as a Mammy-figure configures an act of objectification with which Manon disregards her black maid as both a woman and a mother. Patton explains how"[m]otherhood [was] in a sense perverted by removing it from the affective realm and transforming it into a service performed against one's will" (34). The violation of Sarah's body highlights this perversity and shows how Manon reduces Sarah to Mammy, "to a body to be used" (Patton 35).

Quoting Clinton, Patton points out that the image of the Mammy "'…reduced black women to an animal-like state of exploitation: Mammies were to be milked, warm bodies to

serve white needs – an image with its own sexual subtext'" (35). This "sexual subtext" is specifically revealed in the current example from the novel as Manon literally places herself in her husband's position: "This is what he does, [she] thought", while "a sharp, warm jet hit[s] her throat," leaving her with "[a] sensation of utter strangeness" (81). Manon's imitation of Mr. Gaudet's supposed exploitation of Sarah's body may be seen both as an expression of insubordination as well as a critique of her husband's transgressions. While she imagines her mother bearing "horrified witness to [her] action," Manon amusingly envisions her husband's reaction, "lifting his head from his books with an uncomfortable suspicion that something was not adding up" (81-82). That which is "not adding up" denotes Manon assuming the liberty to exploit Sarah's body as she wishes – a liberty which in reality only belongs to her husband.

Tellingly, "…the image of Mammy was used to illustrate the closeness of the slave to the master and his family," yet this "supposed closeness…was often more imagined than real" (Patton 33). The critic proposes that the image of the "Mammy is ultimately a symbol of exploitation rather than an illustration of cross-racial bonding" (35). The way in which Manon simultaneously exploits the images of the Jezebel and the Mammy underlines how the stereotypes of black women were constructed as a means to serve white slaveholders' needs. Thus the novel also demonstrates the construction of gender roles and how these were performed under duress within the slave community.

The Vicious Cycle and the Legacy of Slavery

When Manon and Sarah return to Lousiana and find themselves locked up again in the same room for fear of an insurrection, Manon facetiously remarks on the quiet atmosphere, claiming "'[she] do[esn't] see any signs of an uprising'" (113). She then directs her eyes at "Sarah, who was on her knees, looking up at [Manon], her eyebrows knit as if [she'd]

addressed her in a language [Sarah] didn't understand" (113). The image of Sarah "on her knees, looking up" at Manon highlights the black woman's position beneath her white mistress in the social hierarchy. Sarah's frown may thus be said to indicate her despair of Manon's prevailing disregard for her condition, and as if speaking "a language she didn't understand," Sarah uses her hidden transcript as a critique of the "dominant" – her white mistress – and, by implication, showing "signs of an uprising." Accordingly, Sarah's reaction also foreshows the crucial event about to unfold.

Suspecting Sarah of knowing more about the insurrection than herself, Manon regrets having spoken amusingly and admits to the reader how she "wanted nothing more than to pour out the tale of [her] unhappiness to someone who loved [her]" (113). Manon's yearning for someone to talk to about her misery reminds of Jacobs's Linda Brent who, too, "longed for someone to confide in," and who "would have given the world to have laid [her] head on [her] grandmother's faithful bosom, and told [her] all [her] troubles" (27). Sarah is undoubtedly "long[ing] for someone to confide in" about her tyrannical master, but as the novel demonstrates, the sexual exploitation of the female slave is forced to be kept a secret. Although Manon and Sarah both wish they had someone to share their suffering with, the distance that the white mistress creates between them, prevent them from confiding in each other.

When Manon realizes that "[t]he event [they] all feared most had begun," she witnesses Sarah dropping her baby "soundlessly" out the window (114). While Manon wonders at the meaning of this scenario, being unaware of Sarah's arrangement with Delphine, Sarah's action indicates a desperate endeavor to ensure the safety and freedom of her child. Based on her own experience as a female slave, Sarah is unquestionably intent to spare her daughter of a similar fate. Walter, on the other hand, "wouldn't hear a gun fired next to his ear" (128), and may therefore be said to be shielded from the harsh reality of slavery,

including the truth about his existence. Moreover, Sarah sees in Walter the source of her own shame and trauma, forever reminded of her perpetrator by her son's physical resemblance to him. When Walter appears before the insurrectionists, the captain "dr[aws] the obvious conclusion" and amusingly remarks how "'Miss High Yellow got herself a little redheaded monkey" (118-119), with which the novel illuminates how black women were also often judged and stigmatized by other slaves, owing in part to the negating images which served to conceal the exploitation inherent in liaisons between white slaveholders and their female slaves.

The portrayal of Walter as a burden and a "curse" is highlighted in the climactic scenes of the novel, where the child's recklessness implicitly leads to his father's death and almost gets in the way of Sarah's escape. In the midst of the dramatic event, Gaudet has gained control of the situation, pointing his pistol at the captain's head, until Walter, described as "[a]n eerie pale figure," suddenly "whirl[s] toward [them], its feet barely touching the ground" (122). This description of Walter evokes the image of a ghost, thus highlighting Manon and Sarah's experience of being haunted by the child's presence. The way in which Walter is depicted as a liminal figure may also be said to underscore his rootless and ambiguous existence: being property, he does not belong to a mother or a father, and his "racial markers" resist easy classification into "black" or "white." Consequently, Walter is "the man…on the boundary, whose human and familial status, by the very nature of the case, ha[s] yet to be defined" (Spillers 74).

When Walter clings to his father's legs he causes Gaudet to stumble, providing the captain with the upper hand. After having been shaken off the legs of a furious Gaudet, Walter soon "collide[s] with Sarah and [clings] to her skirt" (123). The scenario may imply how the child desperately attempts to seek parental recognition and protection, yet Gaudet and Sarah's reactions demonstrate how they both reject him. Manon observes "[Sarah's] rage and

desperation as she struggled to free herself…kicking the creature, who released her, wailing in distress" (123). Sarah's primary reason for discarding Walter is to expose his father – her rapist – to one of the insurrectionists. Her act provides the slaves with the opportunity to murder Gaudet, whose death readily symbolizes the demise of his reign as master of his plantation and household – his head being cut off with a "cane knife" (123).

Paralyzed by the shock of her husband's brutal death, Manon fails to realize that she has become the only hindrance to Sarah's pursuit of freedom. When she understands that they are both aiming for the horse as a means of escape, Manon's earlier imagination about a physical strife between her and Sarah become reality. However, in a culminating act of resistance, Sarah ends up as the victor. When Sarah manages to control the reckless horse, the novel creates her a heroine, courageously riding away from her mistress, "clutching her baby across her stomach…her skirt bellowing out behind her" (124). Thus the scene may also be said to demonstrate how Sarah claims herself as well as her motherhood – taking control of her daughter's fate. Revealing her racial bias and jealousy, Manon is astonished by Sarah's riding skills and is distracted from "[her] own peril" (124).

While the previous scene offers hope for the female slave and her freedom, the narrative offers a less optimistic turn. Despaired and envious of Sarah's successful escape, Manon recalls Sarah as "a snarling dog" when struggling to free herself from her mistress's grip (127). When Manon concludes that Sarah must have hoped for her mistress to be murdered along with her master, she declares her own survival "with satisfaction" (127) – her husband may be dead, but she is not. As if to underscore how the mistress's declaration implies a threat to Sarah, Manon explains how "it seemed the darkness around [her] was as much behind [her] eyes as in front of them" and admits that "[she] gave up trying to see through it" (127). Accordingly, the novel accentuates how Manon's selfishness clouds her perception of Sarah's condition and that she has even given up "trying to see through it."

The dramatic event has materialized Manon's wish to become a widow, yet she is no longer a "marriageable commodity" (170) as she is left with her husband's debts, a disfigured face, and an injured arm which will never fully recover. Her disadvantages underscore Manon's prevailing inability to live up to her mother's ideal of womanhood, which entails "uphold[ing the pillars of [her] temple with her frail *white* hand" (Welter qtd. in Patton 30; emphasis in the original). Moreover, Manon is left with the living emblem of her husband's depravity – Walter – who has become "as impossible to accustom [herself] to or rid [herself] of as [her] own crippled right arm" (167). By the sound of Walter's haunting footsteps in the hallway, Manon expresses her despair of her husband's legacy: "Of course…My husband would have his revenge upon me, and he would have it every day for the rest of my live" (146). "'The heir apparent,'" Manon ironically remarks when Walter enters the room and exposes himself to his mistress's doctor. As though to underline Walter's blissful ignorance with regard to his own condition, the child responds to Manon's remark with "a shout of what sounded like joy" (146). However, in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade her husband's brother into taking the child "off [her] hands," Manon reveals Walter's position outside the system of patrimony, remarking how "[t]his was one piece of his brother's property he wanted nothing to do with" (150).

While Manon acknowledges Sarah's reason for wanting to escape her master, she still fails to understand Sarah's endeavor to free herself from the chains of slavery and her status as property: "My husband is dead…Why would she run now, when she was safe from him?" (137). When Manon explains to her husband's brother her intention to bring Sarah back, she reveals how she does not owe Sarah her freedom: "'If I have to live with Walter…'so does she'" (151). In addition to being a haunting reminder of Manon's tyrannical husband, Walter may also be said to emblematize the prevailing silence around the sexual violation of enslaved women which the novel presents as an expression of white male dominance. Gaudet's

transgressions have ruined the lives of both Sarah and Manon, and the inability to speak of them presumably haunts them both. Walter's survival therefore symbolizes the anxiety that is created and recreated as a result of repression.

Proving her dependency on Sarah's subordination, Manon is no less eager to regain possession of Sarah when she finds out how her black maid has been disguising herself as a white man and even given herself the French name, Mr Maître, which means master. Manon's aunt readily marks Sarah's double "Otherness" when she warns her niece about Sarah's return: "'She has passed as a free woman, and that experience is generally deleterious to a negro's character'" (204). As though to highlight the power hierarchy in which the white mistress and her black slave are both oppressed, Manon corrects her aunt by pointing out that "[Sarah] has tasted a freedom [her] and [her aunt] will never know," which is "travel[ing] about the country as a free white man" (205). In this maneuver the novel illuminates the social hierarchy that Johnson illustrates in her tetra polar graph, where "blackness" and "femininity" are both categories of "Otherness" and difference.

However, Manon still fails to understand the reality of chattel slavery, and her trivial manner of discussing Sarah's fate readily reveals her indifference. The novel emphasizes Manon's persistent belief in her own superiority and the subordination of people of color when she lets her annoyance by Mr Roget flicking a "small fleck of white plaster" (184) on her carpet determine Sarah's fate. After his hopeless effort to persuade Manon into selling Sarah, Mr Roget proclaims that Sarah will never be found, and that "[s]he is no longer [Manon's] property nor anyone else's" (186). Upon hearing this "interesting bit of information" (186), Manon's uncle associates "blackness" with property by remarking how the message sounded like a declaration of Sarah's death. The comment may therefore be said to imply that in the eyes of the dominant culture Sarah can exist only as property, which

offers a disturbing prophecy of Sarah's fate by indicating that she will remain the property of someone else and never be regarded as a person in her own right.

When Manon admits "that [her] aunt was right, [her] heart was cold," she explains that "it wasn't childlessness that had chilled it. It was the lie at the center of everything, the great lie [they] all supported, tended, and worshipped as if [their] lives depended on it" (194). Accordingly, Manon critiques the patriarchic system and its "lies" which govern and control everyone's lives. Nevertheless, her lack of empathy with her black maid persists, despite her knowledge that black women were "bred for [the masters'] own pleasure" (195). Evoking Sarah's struggle for freedom, Manon asserts how "[she] would hold fast to [her] independence as a man clings to a life raft in a hurricane" (195). However, Manon's final decision to bring Sarah back into slavery and claim her ownership reveals that her independence is imaginary. Although her husband is dead, she assumes his place by identifying herself as a slave owner by claiming Sarah as her property. As Donaldson observes, Manon is unable "to recognize how tightly her identity is interwoven with Sarah's, whose dependence and subordination define Manon's very sense of self" (279). By unmasking the social hierarchy and revealing how the power relations between the master, the mistress, and the black woman manifest themselves, the novel highlights how Manon's portrayal of Sarah's "Otherness" and subordination is constructed and conditioned rather than grounded in reality.

When Sarah returns to her mistress, she continues to reject Walter when he demands attention, implying how he is a reminder of Sarah's sexual trauma. Adding to Sarah's anxiety, Manon claims that "'[Walter is] as much [Sarah's] responsibility as [her own],'" and as though speaking Sarah's own thoughts: "'God knows, I didn't ask for him, but here he is'" (207). Manon then admits how her own lack of freedom as a woman influences her relation to Sarah; she expresses her bitterness towards her black maid for having "beat[en] [her] to the

horse'" (207) and, by implication, having had a taste of freedom before her white mistress. Sarah's determined posture and attention to her mistress, which Manon describes as giving her "an odd sensation," demonstrates insubordination and integrity. Thus the novel shows how Sarah's experience of freedom has empowered her sense of self; she sees herself as a as a subject in her own right, not an object in someone else's possession. By raising her eyes to meet Manon's gaze Sarah demonstrates how she levels herself with her mistress, acknowledging her as her "equal," no longer an oppressor and a threat. Sarah declares her baby-girl dead, suggesting that her daughter is no longer property – hence "non-existent" by the laws and norms of chattel slavery. Accordingly, the novel indicates how Sarah's motherhood has become a site of empowerment.

Sarah reveals an empowered sense of self by proudly telling her mistress about her experience in the North, where she was offered a cup of tea and asked if "[she] want[ed] cream and sugar" (208). Manon is "dumbfounded" by how this trivial scenario had appealed so strongly to her maid, and points out that this "was more than [she] had ever heard [Sarah] say" (208). Accordingly, Sarah constructs herself as agent and speaking subject, articulating her desires.

When Manon attempts to picture her black maid being served tea by a "colorless Yankee woman…The righteous husband fetch[ing] a cushion to make their guest more comfortable," she remarks how the image "[strikes] her as perfectly ridiculous" (209). Thus Manon reveals her jealousy and shows how her racist attitude and perception of Sarah as inferior remains the same. By Manon's prevailing need to identify Sarah as her property after her husband's death, the novel underlines how the social structures at large create and recreate power relations. Sarah's persistent portrayal as the ultimate "Other" emphasizes how the novel is both an example and a critique of master narratives which claim the authority to define and silence the "Other." The novel's dystopian ending shows how Martin

problematizes the concept of freedom, implying the dangerous implications of a system based on dominance and subordination. Martin's return to slavery as a site of historical re-construction demonstrates the survival of racist and sexist ideologies, and the importance of uncovering the unspeakable and the unspoken.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the ways in which Octavia E. Butler and Valerie Martin inscribe the memory of slavery and how they offer alternative perspectives on America's history, which critique and complement the historical master narrative. Through their exploration of chattel slavery the two authors disclose and critique the ideology of white male supremacy that justified the enslavement of African Americans and the oppression of women – both black and white. By recovering the traumatic slave past through the formerly silenced African American female subjects and the neglected perspective of the white plantation mistress, the authors show the interrelatedness of racial and gender oppression in a prevailing system of domination and subordination. Most importantly, they demonstrate the double oppression of black women, the ultimate "Other" in the American social hierarchy. This study has shown how this double "Otherness" is a result of the objectification of both "blackness" and femininity which in turn justified the sexual exploitation of enslaved women by white slaveholders. Sexual violence is a prominent theme in the primary texts in this thesis and their analyses reveal how white male authority mechanisms of power serve to keep the "Other" in "its place." *Property*'s perspective serves to highlight the conflation of racism and sexism by showing the ways in which the sexuality of the plantation mistress was controlled in the patriarchic society at large and in the hegemonic family structure in particular. The novel also complements Butler's *Kindred* by underscoring the black woman's position at the bottom rung of society with the white woman being "above" the black woman in the social power hierarchy.

The two authors differ in their politics of narration which reflects their respective ethnic – and cultural backgrounds. As an African American woman writer whose novel explores salient like racism, sexism, sexuality, family, and identity, Butler draws membership

in black feminist discourse of the seventies. As a contributor to the neo-slave narrative genre, she demands that attention be given to the interrelatedness between the past and the present and argues for the necessity of recovering the traumatic memories of slavery. Confrontation with familial history – and a mixed-race heritage in particular – is seen as essential to the construction of the black female subject. The fragmented and non-linear narrative structure of her novel reflects the protagonist-narrator's ambiguous sense of self in her late twentieth-century environment. In a broader context, this narrative structure also demonstrates America's fragmented histories and suggests a critique of master narratives and hegemonic conceptions of historical linearity.

Chapter One has shown how the novel foregrounds bodily experience under slavery to raise both the protagonist's and the reader's critical awareness towards cultural trauma in general and the historiography of slavery in particular. The politics of Dana's time travels and her connection to her great-grandmother, Alice, has been analyzed to illustrate how the protagonist embodies the "memories" of her maternal ancestor. Hirsch's theory of postmemory has been used to examine how familial memories of cultural trauma are transmitted through generations, and how Dana may be said to embody such memories and respond to the trauma of her maternal ancestor. Her insertion into Alice's life in the past forces her to witness and experience her great-grandmother's trauma, including the constant threat of violence and rape. Thus Dana's time travel may be said to suggest how her postmemory becomes first-hand experience as she is forced to become a first-generation witness and victim of slavery. The protagonist's time travels between the past and the present propose a journey towards historical –and self-awareness. The analysis shows how her involuntary time travels transform her status as subject (or agent) in the late twentieth-century to being an object (of exploitation) in the antebellum South. She is forced to see herself in a broader social and historical context which is necessary for identity-formation in the present.

Her effort to maintain her subjectivity and sense of volition is constricted by the forces of her environment and the threat of violence. Also, her attempt to prevent Rufus from turning into an oppressor fails due to the powerful ideologies of the time. Her new awareness of skin color and white male authority forces her to examine her relationship to her white husband, Kevin. However, the analysis maintains that the two are kindred spirits, which offers possibilities for their relationship in the future.

The chapter shows how Dana and Alice are portrayed as doubles, which underscore their similarities and differences. Although both women's bodies bear the marks of slavery, Alice's restricted environment and condition suggest her dystopian fate. Dana's twentieth-century subjectivity both shields and saves her from assuming the fate of her maternal ancestor and offers possibilities. However, her contemporary environment limits her possibilities for self-fulfillment, which suggests that the nation at large must confront the past and reflect upon its ramifications in the present. In an attempt to break free from the "chains" of the slave past, Butler's novel suggests a reinterpretation of history and its implications for the present. Unlike traumatic past events, memory is a malleable construct which can be used to make sense of those events and open up for possibilities of healing. Chapter One has explored the ways in which the objectification and violation of the enslaved female body impact the historical awareness and self-perception of an initially free African American female subject. By analyzing the protagonist's character transformation the chapter has shown how the pain of history both inhibits and empowers her sense of self. Dana's loss of her arm may indicate the end of her career as a writer, reflecting the cost of confronting a history of pain and the difficulty of working through a traumatic past. However, her mutilation also symbolizes a constant reminder of that past, the pain of her ancestors especially, which suggests how the past is always a part of the present. As my discussion has revealed, Butler demonstrates the futility of repression and argues for the urgency and importance of

remembering the pain of the ancestral past and the violation of black women's bodies in particular. It has also been shown how the novel rejects the prevailing objectification and stigmatization of black women. This is seen by Butler's ways of blurring the boundaries of socio-politically constructed binaries – "blackness" and "whiteness" – as well as through her revision of stigmatizing images of black women during slavery.

Valerie Martin's focus on the white plantation mistress may be said to concur with her Caucasian background although, more importantly, her novel puts the finger on woman's lack of understanding the scope of black women's suffering under slavery. As a critique of master narratives and hegemonic constructions of "Otherness" her novel offers an example of domination through the white woman's stigmatizing portrayal of her black slave. Thus Martin constructs a self-reflexive novel which brings attention to presentations and representations as subjective creations which claim authority and define the "Other." Although the protagonist-narrator, Manon, is oppressed as a woman in society at large and by her husband, in particular, she has no sympathy for her African American maid, Sarah, who, like Dana, is oppressed on the basis of her racial and sexual identity. Chapter Two explores how Manon's portrayal of Sarah is affected by her experience of family relations in her household.

The analysis reveals that Manon projects her own powerlessness and misery onto Sarah by relying on her "whiteness" as a sign of authority and exploiting her black maid's status as property. By analyzing the manifestation of power relations in the novel the chapter exposes how racial and gender identities are constructed and conditioned. This is seen by looking at how the hierarchical relationship between the master, the mistress, and the slave appears as a result of their subjective experiences and fantasies of domination. Manon's jealousy and racist attitude influence her portrayal of and behavior towards Sarah who is the object of her husband's lust as well as the mother of his children. Although despair over the common practices of concubinage and the corruptive forces of patriarchy which represses

these practices, Manon is too consumed by her own misery to empathize with Sarah. The analysis reveals that Manon blames her black maid for her husband's transgressions despite her knowledge about Sarah's innocence and powerlessness.

Martin reframes the theme of concubinage and sexual violence by demonstrating how the sexuality of both the white plantation mistress and the enslaved black woman is controlled by white male authority and coercion. Thus she reveals the interrelatedness between Manon and Sarah's sexualities and how the two are victims under white male patriarchy. Accordingly, Manon's relation to her husband and Sarah's status as property is problematized. Womanhood and motherhood have been important components in the comparative analysis between the two female characters as a means to demonstrate the abject violation of Sarah's body within the slaveholding institution. The notion of motherhood under slavery is problematized by Sarah's relation to Walter, whom she rejects because he is a constant reminder of her master and rapist. To Manon, Walter is both a living proof of her husband's depravity and sexual inclinations as well as a reminder of her own childlessness. While stigmatizing images of black womanhood and her status as property make Sarah an available target of rape, ideals of white womanhood with the emphasis on motherhood serves to augment Manon's sense of shame. The chapter thus shows how the protagonist's childlessness affects her relation to and portrayal of Sarah, which is seen by how she disregards the complexity of motherhood for enslaved women.

Chapter Two examines that Gaudet exploits Sarah's status as a slave to satisfy his lasciviousness, claiming her as sexual property. It also shows how Manon imitates her husband's exercise of power by objectifying Sarah both as her object of contempt and vengeance and at the level of the narrative. As the protagonist-narrator, Manon objectifies Sarah through her gaze and portrays her as a promiscuous slave woman by exploiting the image of the Jezebel. This is seen by how she studies her husband's visual fixation of Sarah's

body as if he were mastering it with his gaze – declaring his possession and sexual demands. The analysis reveals how Manon also objectifies Sarah through language by way of possessive pronouns that mark her as property. Thus the novel demonstrates how verbal objectification highlights her status and refuses her subjectivity. Manon declares her own possession of Sarah – identifying her as property and not a woman in her own right. Despite her husband's death, Manon does not owe Sarah her freedom, which suggests her prevailing need to preserve her own position in a system of "Otherness." Although she is no longer oppressed by Gaudet, she is still an "Other" in society at large. While Manon, who claims Sarah as her slave, still sees her black maid as the ultimate "Other," Sarah experiences Manon as her equal: – both women in and victims of a patriarchic system of domination and subordination.

This thesis has shown how Octavia E. Butler and Valerie Martin both revisit the slave past as a site of exploration for existing ideologies of dominance and issues of racial and gender oppression. They critique hegemonic ideologies which create and recreate the "Other," and thus problematize the ramifications of the slave past in the present. While Butler's *Kindred* explores the legacy of slavery through the portrayal of a late twentieth-century African American woman, Martin's twenty-first century novel *Property* testifies to the prevailing need to uncover the traumatic history. Although this study demonstrates the persisting necessity to turn to the past and reflect upon its meaning for the present, it also shows the continuance of history and the importance of the past to the future. While it is important to remember the abominable institution of slavery and the pain of the past, it is perhaps also time to create new sites of memory which are not defined by a history of slavery and ideologies of race.

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